

California and Trump administration square off in latest battles over immigration

Standing near a 7-Eleven in Boyle Heights on Thursday morning, Roberto Pedraza hawked tamales and cups of champurrado, the Mexican hot drink, out of insulated jugs stationed on top of plastic crates.

He knew the store chain had been a recent target of immigration raids. Federal agents last week conducted audits and inspections of nearly 100 7-Eleven stores nationwide, including several in Los Angeles.

As the main breadwinner of his family, Pedraza, 42, said he couldn't afford to abandon the location and lose loyal customers.

"You could say I'm being bold," he said, chuckling. "Really, I am worried, maybe a little scared. All I can do is run and hope they won't deport me."

The 7-Eleven raids, which are national in scope, are just a part of a yearlong game of chicken between the Trump administration and California leaders over immigration. The raids and other events — including Trump's vulgar remarks about African and Latin American countries, his elimination of temporary legal protections for Salvadorans and the uncertainty surrounding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program — have created a sense of repetitive whiplash among some immigrants.

That was before the San Francisco Chronicle reported Tuesday that immigration officials are preparing for a major sweep of Northern California cities, in which agents would look to arrest 1,500 immigrants in the country illegally. The Chronicle cited an anonymous source familiar with the operation who said the campaign could happen within weeks.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) called the plans "deeply shameful" and "an act of pure malice."

"The people of San Francisco know that our immigrants are the constant reinvigoration of our community and our nation," she said. "We will continue to

speak out against the administration's cynical, cowardly attempts to turn our local police forces into deportation forces."

While it remains unclear whether there will actually be a raid (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have not confirmed or denied the existence of the operation), acting Director Thomas Homan earlier this month sounded a warning to California.

Reacting on Fox News to California's new "sanctuary state" law, which blocks local and state law enforcement from using resources to help federal immigration agents, Homan said:

"California better hold on tight — they're about to see a lot more deportation officers. If politicians don't protect their communities, then ICE will."

Trump's broadsides against California play well to his conservative base, which sees the state as the ultimate symbol of much of what they oppose — including immigration and environmental policies. Trump was the first president since Dwight D. Eisenhower to skip a visit to California in his first calendar year of office. The state has been a leader in fighting against much of the Trump agenda.

California Republican campaign consultant Rob Stutzman said politicians in the state can also enjoy the fight because it similarly boosts their base.

"There's almost a macabre symbiotic relationship that I think California leaders have with the Trump administration at the moment," he said. "But it's bad for embattled Republicans in California."

Stutzman said the key for those Republicans to retain their seats is to not energize more Democrats to vote in the midterm elections — something that increased ICE raids could do.

While Stutzman said any dire consequences from the political enmity between the state and federal governments haven't yet manifested, he said it could get confusing for people and businesses responding to conflicting state and federal policies.

"Which master are they supposed to serve — the federal or state government?" he said.

Since Trump became president, Pedraza said he has been reading up on immigration law and civil rights. He also now watches the news twice a day to keep up with the back-and-forth between California and Trump administration officials.

“Why doesn’t he focus on anybody else?” Pedraza said. “Sometimes I get the feeling he doesn’t want California to exist. He looks at the state as if it’s filled with only criminals.”

This week, several California public officials released statements reacting to the rumored upcoming raids.

The state’s two Democratic U.S. senators, Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris, asked Homan to brief them on how immigration raids are prioritized and requested all communications regarding upcoming raids in the state.

“We firmly believe that law enforcement must prioritize dangerous criminals, not undocumented immigrants who do not pose a threat to public safety,” the senators wrote. “Diverting resources in an effort to punish California and score political points is an abhorrent abuse of power, not to mention a terrible misuse of scarce resources.”

San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi vowed to assist residents who are targeted in raids. San Francisco is one of three cities in the country that provide free public defense for detained immigrants. Adachi’s office represents nearly 70 clients currently in detention facilities.

“We will resist the Trump administration’s attempts to divide our communities,” he said. “I don’t think they have thought through exactly how hard we will fight back in court.”

Concerned about rumblings of possible immigration sweeps, state Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra on Thursday warned employers that he is prepared to seek fines against them if they violate a new state law that prohibits businesses from giving information on employees to federal authorities.

He said immigrants worried about raids should make sure they know their rights and carry on with their lives as usual.

“I imagine this isn’t the first time they don’t know what could happen tomorrow,”

he said. "Like always, you have to continue on. You can't live your life based on rumors."

Like Pedraza, Lorena Robles, 42, was not much of a news junkie — until Trump was elected.

"Now I'm constantly listening to the news or reading it," said the tamale vendor, seated in a garden chair behind a plastic table on Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles. "I don't have time for *novelas* anymore."

Robles, her husband and two daughters came to the country illegally from Mexico. The ongoing threats of deportation have left her in a near-constant state of anguish.

When the president focuses on other issues, Robles said she momentarily feels OK. But the moment he starts talking about immigrants again, her fears return.

"There have been times when I can't taste the food in my mouth because of it," she said. "It's awful."

Yesenia Rodriguez, 34, sometimes imagines immigration officers grabbing her while she cooks pupusas in MacArthur Park. She thinks of her 2-year-old son, who was born in Los Angeles.

Rodriguez said she didn't worry much until Trump was elected. She and her 16-year-old son came to the U.S. illegally from El Salvador in 2014.

She said it's hard not to take what the words and actions coming out of the White House personally.

"Did you hear what he said about us?" she said. "We're not safe anywhere."

Source: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-immigration-anxiety-20180118-story.html>

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