

# Texas Legislature Reverses Course On Immigration Laws

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By [David Martin Davies](#)

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — The Texas legislature convened in Austin on Tuesday. The lawmakers gather once every two years. And in regard to cracking down on illegal immigration, the political pendulum swing is certainly in evidence this time around.

In January 2011, [Governor Rick Perry](#) gave the [traditional opening remarks](#) to the 82nd Texas legislature and he made it clear: He wanted a crackdown on illegal immigration. “We must abolish sanctuary cities in Texas,” he said.

Perry told the lawmakers he was making an anti-sanctuary cities law an emergency item. He wanted a Texas version of [Arizona’s SB 1070](#). Perry wanted police officers checking the immigration status of anyone they suspected wasn’t properly authorized to be in the country.

“We need to free up our peace officers to do their job keeping our families and neighborhoods safe. Immigration laws and their enforcement are the responsibility of the federal government we cannot compound their failure by preventing Texas peace officers from doing their jobs,” Perry said two years ago.

Despite Perry’s push and the Republican majorities in both Texas Houses, the bill didn’t pass. So now fast forward two years later -- there’s the 83rd Texas legislature and Perry has another crack at passing a Texas SB 1070-type bill and ... nada. What was an emergency two years ago is off the radar today. It didn’t get a mention in the governor’s opening remarks.

“Turned out there was very little enthusiasm for that legislation,” said [Charles Foster](#), a Houston immigration attorney who was a consultant to both the Barack Obama and George W. Bush presidential campaigns. “I think there was over one hundred so called anti-immigrant/sanctuary cities bills filed last time and not a single one passed last time.”

Foster said this time the Republican lawmakers have learned their lesson.

“Most of it was a complete waste of time to begin with because it was bound to be preempted by federal law and it turned out that was the case in [U.S. vs Arizona](#), the Supreme Court ruled,” he said.

And then there was that national election in November that sent shock waves through the Republican Party.

“Bush got 43 percent of the Hispanic vote. A much larger Hispanic vote today that was down to 27 percent for Governor Romney, but in the key toss up states like Colorado he was only getting 10 percent. So the handwriting is on the wall so unless the Republican Party can address these issues responsibly they are going to become a minority party in the state of Texas,” Foster said.

So essentially a figurative memo went out to Texas Republican lawmakers -- introduce no bills that will embarrass the party with Latino voters.

But it’s going to take more than that to repair the damage done to the GOP brand in Texas, according to Representative [Trey Martinez Fischer](#). He's chair of the [Mexican American Legislative Caucus](#).

“They believe in English-only. They think Texas should not have pre-K education for its children, 65 percent of pre-K children are Hispanic. They want to make it a crime to be in this country illegally, And they want to repeal the Dream Act. I don’t think you can reach out to Hispanics if these are your values,” Martinez Fischer said.

Martinez Fischer said the Texas Republicans are learning how to talk the talk, but they aren’t willing to walk the walk when it comes to serving Latino voters.

However, there are a record number of Latino Republican lawmakers in the 83rd Legislature in Texas, and they might be able to lead the rest of their party in walking that walk.

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