

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2007**

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## **Business and Religious Leaders Create Alliance to Advocate for Immigrants**

(SPRINGDALE and LITTLE ROCK) - Church, civic and business leaders announced Monday the formation of the Arkansas Friendship Coalition, a statewide advocacy group that will oppose punitive state and municipal laws targeting immigrants in Arkansas.

This morning, Arkansas Friendship Coalition Chairman Steve Copley and Archie Schaffer, senior vice president for external affairs at Tyson Foods, held the group's first news conference at the Springdale Chamber of Commerce. Monday afternoon, Copley and Randy Wilbourn, senior vice president for corporate communications at Alltel, led a second news conference at the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce.

A statement issued by the group said: "We are a nation of immigrants. The very foundations of our country were built on the hopes, dreams and aspirations of immigrants; hopes and dreams of a land of opportunity that would provide a better life for their families. Those same aspirations today imbue the more than 100,000 immigrants who have come to call Arkansas home."

The coalition's leadership said they have come together to encourage a reasonable and respectful approach to the immigration debate in Arkansas. Their plans include lobbying elected officials, speaking to civic and community groups and other advocacy strategies.

The Arkansas Friendship Coalition maintains that immigration is a federal issue and that state and local money should not be wasted to fix a problem that is ultimately a responsibility of the federal government.

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"It is critically important to American business that Comprehensive Immigration Reform be passed by Congress, but this is a problem that can only be fixed at that level," said Schaffer. "State and local governments should not be involving themselves in issues that only Congress can really address."

Wilbourn of Alltel said, "America's immigrants have always been and will remain an integral part of our community and our future. Without a fair and balanced approach to dealing with immigration in this country, we will continue to hurt our society and impede our economic opportunity."

Business leaders cited a recent study by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation that reports the following:

- Immigrants added \$3 billion to the Arkansas economy in 2004.
- Arkansas' immigrant community used \$237 million in state services (mostly educational and health services) in 2004 but paid \$257 million in taxes resulting in a surplus to the state budget of almost \$20 million.
- If all immigrants left the state tomorrow, Arkansas' manufacturing output would drop by \$1.4 billion and factories would close across Arkansas due to an acute labor shortage
- Immigrant spending has created 23,100 jobs that are held primarily by Arkansans born in the United States.
- Without its immigrant community, Central Arkansas alone would lose \$638 million in business revenues, 5,000 jobs and \$143 million in payroll. An even greater impact would occur in Northwest Arkansas.

Copley invited Arkansans to join the coalition. "We ask others to join our efforts to speak up for the growing immigrant community, to share in their hopes and dreams of a better life, which is the American dream."

More information can be found at the coalition's Web site, [www.arfriendshipcoalition.org](http://www.arfriendshipcoalition.org). To read the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation report, [www.wrfoundation.org](http://www.wrfoundation.org).

# **FOUNDING MEMBERS**

## **ARKANSAS FRIENDSHIP COALITION**

- Rev. Steve Copley, Chairman of the Arkansas Friendship Coalition and a United Methodist pastor
- Archie Schaffer, Government Affairs, Tyson Foods
- Randy Wilbourn, Alltel Corporation
- Rita Sklar, Director of the Arkansas affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union
- Warren Stephens, Stephens Inc.
- Rev. Gordon Garlington and Rev. Howard Gordon, Presbyterian pastors
- Neal Sealy, ACORN
- Ruth Shepherd and Just Communities of Central Arkansas
- Tommy Fish, Associated General Contractors (AGC)
- Graham Catlett and Paul Charton, Catlett and Stodola Law Firm
- Rev. Michael Mattox, Methodist minister
- Rev. Wendell Griffen, a Baptist pastor
- Bishop Larry Maze, retired Episcopal Bishop
- Stacy Sells and Michele Bond, Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods
- Mary Beth Ringgold, a restaurateur and owner of Cajuns Wharf, Copper Grill and Capers
- Rabbi Gene Levy, Reform Jewish leader in Little Rock
- Rev. Lowell Grisham of Fayetteville, an Episcopalian priest
- Skip Rutherford, Clinton School of Public Service
- Rev. Joyce Hardy an Episcopalian pastor
- Penelope Sur, a graduate student at the Clinton School of Public Service
- Alan Leveritt for *Arkansas Times* and *El Latino* newspapers
- Haskell Dickinson, president of McGeorge Contracting
- Rev. Bob Klein, a Unitarian Universalist pastor