

# The Morning News

## Local News for Northwest Arkansas

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### Immigration Reform Could Harm State, State GOP Director Says

By [John Lyon](#)

THE MORNING NEWS

LITTLE ROCK -- In an e-mail to a Republican legislator, the executive director of the Republican Party of Arkansas cautioned against "feel-good legislation" to combat illegal immigration.

State GOP chairman Dennis Milligan said Wednesday he had not seen the e-mail sent by party director Karen Ray, but he said illegal immigration is a problem that has to be solved at the federal level, not the state level.

"Passing fair policies that make it easier for businesses to locate in Arkansas should be our priority, not passing feel-good legislation that is unconstitutional and runs the risk of making our party look racist. I'm sorry if that sounds harsh," Ray wrote in the e-mail.

She also wrote that that lawmakers "should be championing economic policies that create jobs, not introducing immigration legislation that makes Arkansas less attractive to business."

Ray said Wednesday her comments were not meant to reflect the state party's views.

"With that being said, the Republican Party being an all-inclusive party is firmly committed to policies that provide economic growth for industry in Arkansas and better paying jobs for all Arkansans. I have an obligation to listen to concerns from all entities involved in this discussion," Ray told The Associated Press in an e-mail.

Milligan said Wednesday he had not seen the e-mail and could not comment on it or whether Ray's comments were in line with the party's views on immigration.

"The party's position on immigration, coming from me, the chairman, is that is a federal issue that has got to be determined by the president and Congress," Milligan said. "They've got to come to a meeting of the minds. Anything that's done internally statewide (through) legislation is probably going to have a difficult time ... trumping federal law."

State Rep. Rick Green, R-Van Buren, one of a group of legislators leading an interim study on the effects of illegal immigration on the state, said Wednesday he disagreed with the opinions expressed in the e-mail but had not yet had a chance to discuss them with Ray.

Green said he did speak to the legislator who received the e-mail, whom he declined to name.

"People make mistakes forwarding e-mails to people they trust, and they get forwarded on, and I think that's what happened, from what I was able to gather," Green said. "I don't know exactly what all happened there, but I know that the representative regrets this e-mail ever getting out."

Ray apparently was expressing her opinion in a conversation she believed was private, which was her right, Green said.

"I don't think the party as a whole is involved in this issue," he said.

But with both the executive director and the chairman of the state Republican Party speaking against immigration reform at the state level, the party leadership appears to be at odds with Green and other Republican lawmakers who say the state may need to act on immigration.

Green said it is too soon to say what kind of legislation, if any, may result from the interim study, but he said in the absence of immigration reform at the federal level, the Legislature has a responsibility at least to study the issue.

"I really resent the fact that the state of Arkansas is having to use taxpayers' money to even study this, because this is an expense to the state that we shouldn't have to be doing," he said. "But the people want us to be forthright about money being spent, and they want us to follow suit with what some of these other states are doing to crack down on illegal activity."

Milligan's predecessor as GOP chairman, Sen. Gilbert Baker, R-Conway, supported taking at least some action on immigration at the state level. In 2005, Baker was the Senate sponsor of legislation allowing Arkansas state troopers to receive training in enforcing federal immigration laws.

Since that law was passed, no Arkansas troopers have received the training, but last week the state police sent a letter to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement asking for information about the training.