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Gabrielle Giffords and the DREAM act

by Demetria Martinez

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I lived in Tucson, Arizona for almost ten years in the 1990s; my activism included work with Derechos Humanos, a human rights group that monitors border patrol abuses.

One of our founding members, attorney Isabel Garcia, has been a high-profile advocate for the human rights of immigrants. For decades this has earned her the hatred of those who have claimed that she wants the Southwest to be returned to Mexico. This would sound like a joke except that she has long been threatened with violence and even death.

I am more worried than ever for Isabel and others advocating a humane immigration policy. The cold blooded shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson last week was almost bound to happen in our current climate of right-wing extremism and its violent rhetoric and imagery -- much of it aimed at immigrants.

It is significant that Giffords voted for the DREAM Act, which would have allowed children of undocumented workers, including those who have served in the military, the opportunity to attend college. The bill passed in the House but failed in the Senate.

While we may never fully penetrate the psychological make-up of the unhinged young man who tried to murder Giffords, it's clear that this country's poisoned partisan atmosphere makes it more probable that such a scenario will repeat itself.

Even Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik, in the wake of the shooting, described Arizona as the capital of "the anger, the hatred and the bigotry that goes on in this country."

Last year the state passed some of the most far-reaching anti-immigrant legislation in U.S. history,

SB1070. Among other things, the legislation seeks to deputize law enforcement agents, allowing them to act as immigration agents, thus magnifying the nightmarish plight of those who daily face deportation and break up of families. Not to mention the plight of dark-skinned people who allegedly look like immigrants and who are victims of mistaken deportation.

That same legislation has made ethnic studies programs illegal if they appear to advocate ethnic solidarity. *The New York Times* last week reported that a magnet school in Tucson has been told it must terminate a Latino literature class or lose millions of dollars in federal funding.

God have mercy on us. If all of this can happen in Arizona, it can happen anywhere.

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