



THE IMMIGRATION REFORM LAW INSTITUTE

The Immigration Reform Law Institute (IRLI) is the legal arm of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, better known by its acronym FAIR, which was founded in 1979 by retired Michigan ophthalmologist John Tanton. As the litigation arm of the John Tanton Network, IRLI's primary purpose is to push legal causes that unfairly target immigrant communities. IRLI's purpose is to undermine legal precedent by writing model legislation for Tanton Network organizations, such as State Legislators for Legal Immigration and members of the House Immigration Reform Caucus (both organizations within the larger John Tanton Network).

IRLI also works with extremist anti-immigrant groups and leaders to push anti-immigrant ordinances at the municipal level. The Immigration Reform Law Institute calls itself, "America's only public interest law organization working exclusively to protect the legal rights, privileges, and property of U.S. citizens and their communities from injuries and damages caused by unlawful immigration."

In an oral history of his life, "A Skirmish in a Wider War," FAIR founder John Tanton explains that, in the early 1980s, his efforts to form a litigation organization failed. In 1985, Tanton tried again and launched the IRLI, but made sure he kept IRLI firmly under the control of FAIR, which has tried to portray itself as a mainstream organization despite its links to extremist groups, including white nationalists.

IRLI "was structured in such a way that it could operate under FAIR'S tax exemption but have its own board, appointed initially by FAIR'S board," Tanton says in the oral history. "We tried to keep control of IRLI by making sure that the FAIR board was the ultimate authority in appointing the IRLI board."

IRLI has, among other legal maneuverings:

Sued Michael Chertoff, former Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, despite his aggressive workplace raids that have disrupted many local communities, seriously undermined their economies, and separated families.

- Taken part in a class action suit against the regents of the University of California and other California educators for allowing immigrant students to attend school.
- Gone to court to sue apartment owners who have rented to immigrants, charging the defendants with "illegal harboring."
- Represented a U.S. worker who claims to have suffered "citizenship discrimination and retaliation for complaints about unauthorized alien employment in the workplace in an administrative case with the U.S. Department of Justice."

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IRLI has not simply restricted itself to the courts. It has also assisted with a series of city and state initiatives to pursue its anti-immigration agenda.

IRLI lawyer Kris Kobach was identified in a March 2009 Associated Press story as a Kansas City, Missouri-based attorney representing petitioners in Fremont, Nebraska who wanted to put an initiative on the ballot that would prohibit anyone in the community "from hiring or renting to illegal immigrants."

The story added that the Fremont city council had voted down a similar ordinance in the summer of 2008 and that city leaders tried to block the proposal. "Fremont officials argue that the city lacks such authority because the proposed ordinance would be pre-empted by federal law, would not provide sufficient safeguards to protect constitutional property rights and would violate the Fair Housing Act," the AP reported.

IRLI's general counsel Michael Hethmon and Kobach also assisted the far right Constitution Party of Missouri in a legal appeal when the city council of Valley Park, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb, successfully defended its ordinance prohibiting "the hiring of illegal aliens within Valley Park city limits." According to a February 2008 press release issued by the Constitution Party, "Under the new Ordinance, any Valley Park business employing illegal aliens will lose their (sic) business license." The press release went on to describe the Constitution Party as "the country's only 100% pro-life, pro-secure borders, pro-limited government political party in America."

In California, the Immigration Reform Law Institute has also aligned itself with a state ballot initiative which is now gathering signatures for a 2010 vote. A group calling itself "Taxpayer Revolution" states that the initiative intends "to protect California's taxpayers from the government's failure to enforce federal laws."

The initiative is supported by NumbersUSA, which started in 1997 under the financial and administrative umbrella of U.S. Inc. Both NumbersUSA and U.S. Inc. were founded by John Tanton.

To obtain source information, contact the Center for New Community



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