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Sanctuary-City Mayors Gird for Fight as Trump Threatens Budgets.

Municipalities that protect undocumented immigrants from deportation stand to lose billions in federal aid if President-elect Donald Trump fulfills promises to starve them financially.

More than 200 U.S. 'sanctuary cities' won't turn over people to federal officers seeking to deport them nor share information about them, saying that would rend the social fabric and impede policing. Since Trump's election last week, mayors including San Francisco's Ed Lee, New York's Bill de Blasio and Chicago's Rahm Emanuel have vowed not to back down.

"This city and so many cities around the country will do all we can to protect our residents and to make sure that families are not torn apart," de Blasio said Wednesday after meeting with Trump at Trump Tower.

Many cities have calculated that dwindling populations and labor shortages can be ameliorated by immigrants, undocumented or not. The mayors must calculate the point at which resistance harms the communities they're fighting to protect. The evolving confrontation exposes states' and cities' vulnerability to losing some of the $650 billion in federal funds they receive for everything from police to sidewalks as they confront pension obligations and shrinking budgets.

"There's an economic benefit from being a sanctuary city, but it doesn't appear to warrant giving up 5 to 10 percent of the city's funding," said Dan White, senior economist at Moody's Analytics, in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Congressional Republicans have been trying for years to use federal dollars as leverage.

A bill this year by Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania defines a "sanctuary jurisdiction" as any that restricts local officials from exchanging information about an individual's immigration status or complying with Homeland Security requests. The measure would cut off funds including Economic Development Administration Grants, which totaled $238 million last year, and Community Development Block Grants, which amounted to $3 billion last year. Ten of the largest sanctuary jurisdictions were awarded a collective $700 million in block grants in 2016.

Chicago, the nation's third-largest city after New York and Los Angeles, is particularly vulnerable. Public-employee retirement funds face a $34 billion shortfall, and Emanuel last month proposed a $9.3 billion budget for 2017 that would increase spending to hire and train more police. The spending plan anticipates $1.3 billion in federal grants this year.

"If Chicago were to lose all of its federal funding, that's a game-changer," White said.

Deep-Sixing Documents

In Los Angeles, the police chief said that he would continue a policy of not aiding federal deportation efforts, according to the Los Angeles Times. In New York, de Blasio said last week that he would

consider destroying a database of undocumented immigrants with city identification cards before handing such records over to the Trump administration.

“We are not going to sacrifice a half-million people who live amongst us,” de Blasio said. “We will do everything we know how to do to resist that.”

New York City will receive $7.7 billion in federal grants in fiscal 2017, just under 10 percent of the city’s $82 billion budget.

In New Haven, Connecticut, the city of 130,000 that’s home to Yale University receives about a quarter of its $523 million budget from various federal grants, said Mayor Toni Harp.

“That would be really very difficult,” Harp said. “We would be willing to take that as far as it needed to go in our judicial system.”

Trump made attacks on sanctuary cities a campaign staple, often invoking the shooting death of Kathryn Steinle by an undocumented immigrant in San Francisco. The shooter had been released from a county jail even though federal officials had asked him to be held until they could deport him.

The incoming president has said he would deport more than 11 million people, beginning with gang members, drug dealers and other criminals. He’s also said he would create a special deportation task force within Immigration and Customs and Enforcement. If that’s the case, local jurisdictions might see even more requests for cooperation.

Many cities say that immigration is a federal responsibility and they should be left out of it. Others say that they simply don’t have the time or resources to address it.

Stretched Force

In New Orleans, which doesn’t consider itself a sanctuary city but whose officers don’t ask about immigration status, the specter of losing federal funds is daunting. Some money the city receives is enough to fund nine police officers, said Zach Butterworth, executive counsel for Mayor Mitch Landrieu and director of federal relations.

”The federal government’s support for local law enforcement has really been slashed significantly already,” Butterworth said. “For them to come down here and say you also need to be doing our job on immigration is a tough sell.”

Others say that singling out undocumented immigrants impedes law enforcement because large populations will shun any interaction with the authorities.

“Essentially, for the police, you’ve got a significant number of undocumented illegals in the country and they’re afraid of the police,” said Darrel Stephens, executive director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association.

Lena Graber, special projects attorney at the San Francisco-based Immigrant Legal Resource Center believes Trump will run into legal challenges if he threatens municipal funding.

“The federal government can’t force state and local law enforcement to use their resources to enforce federal regulatory programs like immigration law,” she said. “He can try to offer incentives, but the more that those incentives look like coercion, the more it won’t be legal.”

In Denver, which has a policy of refusing to hold detainees solely on a request by immigration

officials, Mayor Michael Hancock said he won’t be cowed.

“This is all legal what we are doing here,” he said. “The president doesn’t have the authority to unilaterally decide how we move forward.”

In Oakland, California, Mayor Libby Schaaf says she is proud to run a sanctuary city, and is planning to recruit even more towns for the movement.

“The best defense is offense,” she said. “There is strength in numbers.”

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by Lauren Etter and Tim Jones

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