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November 9, 2004

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## Ernesto Portillo Jr.: A leading foe of Prop. 200 promises to continue fight

*Ernesto Portillo Jr., ARIZONA DAILY STAR*

The fatigue is evident in Alexis Mazçn's voice. It's three days after last week's passage of Proposition 200, a new set of state regulations dealing with voting and access to public services. The controversial law is supposed to curtail violation of existing state laws - but, ironically, will create a new class of law-breakers.

Mazçn was one of the state's leading voices in opposition to the initiative funded by out-of-state anti-immigrant groups. She was chairwoman of the Tucson-based Campaign to Defeat Prop. 200, a broad coalition of county residents and organizations.

There were other public faces voicing opposition to Prop. 200. They included former state Attorney General Grant Woods, former state Sen. Alfredo Gutierrez of Phoenix, Melanie Emerson of the American Friends Service Committee in Tucson, and hundreds of people who distributed leaflets and planted signs.

For weeks before the Nov. 2 vote, Mazçn was on television and radio and in debates, often speaking in Spanish, presenting arguments against the initiative.

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Last Tuesday night as it became evident 56 percent of state voters had approved Proposition 200, Maz n told reporters the struggle to defeat it would continue. She remained defiant and optimistic, a reflection of the initiative's opposition.

"We see it as one chapter of a broader struggle," said Maz n, who works in the city's Public Defender's Office.

Maz n, 30, is now a steely veteran of the state's racial and cultural politics. She has been preparing herself since high school.

At University High School, she and other students lobbied the Tucson Unified School District to recruit and admit more minority students to the district's prestigious college-prep high school.

She graduated from Stanford University and New York University Law School, and worked in San Francisco with the Youth Law Center.

Last November she decided to return to Tucson for family reasons. Then Proposition 200 came along.

Maz n saw through the proponents' rhetoric to see the effort for what it was: scapegoating immigrants, specifically Latinos, for the state's economic and political problems.

"There's no end to the number of things that people blame undocumented immigrants for," she said.

Proposition 200 supporters presented it as a way to stem illegal immigration from Mexican and Latin America. But it will not curb illegal immigration, which is caused by poverty in Latin America and demand for cheap labor in this country.

And while it may keep noncitizens from registering to vote and receiving public benefits, it will turn public employees into immigration agents. Those who don't report undocumented immigrants could be charged with a misdemeanor.

Proposition 200 is part of a national campaign to demonize immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, Maz n said. A similar measure in California was ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge.

Opponents of **Prop.** 200 are looking to do the same in Arizona. The proposition could violate the 1965 Voting Rights Act because it creates a two-tier level of voters, Maz n said. Under **Prop.** 200, voters at the polls have to show identification but people who vote by mail do not.

The proposition's vague language also could get it thrown out - or at least narrowed, she added.

Proposition. 200's victory invigorated Arizonans who support civil rights for all. With not enough time and money for campaigning, **Prop.** 200 opponents narrowed the margin of public acceptance by nearly 18 percent from early polls.

"In this area of the country, you need to be defiant and continue to work to preserve civil rights," Maz n said.

\* Ernesto Portillo Jr.'s column appears Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Reach him at 573-4242 or at eportillo@ azstarnet.com. He appears on "Arizona Illustrated," KUAT-TV Channel 6, at 6:30 p.m. and midnight Fridays.

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