



YOUR VOICE

Should adoption agencies receiving state funds be able to deny adoptions based on religion or sexual orientation?

Zark Butler
Decatur



"As far as them having the power to in a home based on religion or sexual orientation, I think they have bigger problems than that...I think they should focus more on structuring the homes that they put these kids in so that they are not abused, instead of just putting them into any home and taking them away from family that loves them and takes care of them...And with sexual orientation, if they are loving the kid and taking care of the kid then it shouldn't matter..."

Marco Zuno
Atlanta



"Basically, I think it's stupid. Honestly, to have somebody who doesn't have an actual parent, and have somebody who chooses to have a child, who doesn't belong to them, to care for them and give them everything that they need, it doesn't matter what you are, what religion you are, what sexual orientation, because these people are actually taking time to help someone. I mean, you have someone who wants the kid. What's wrong with that?..."

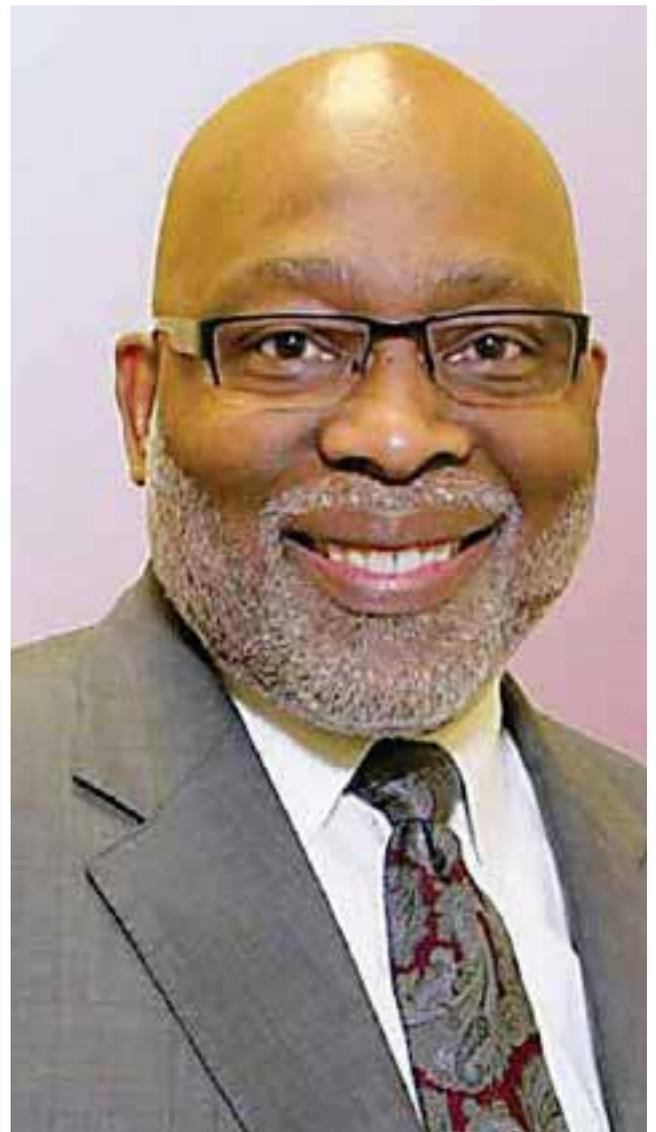
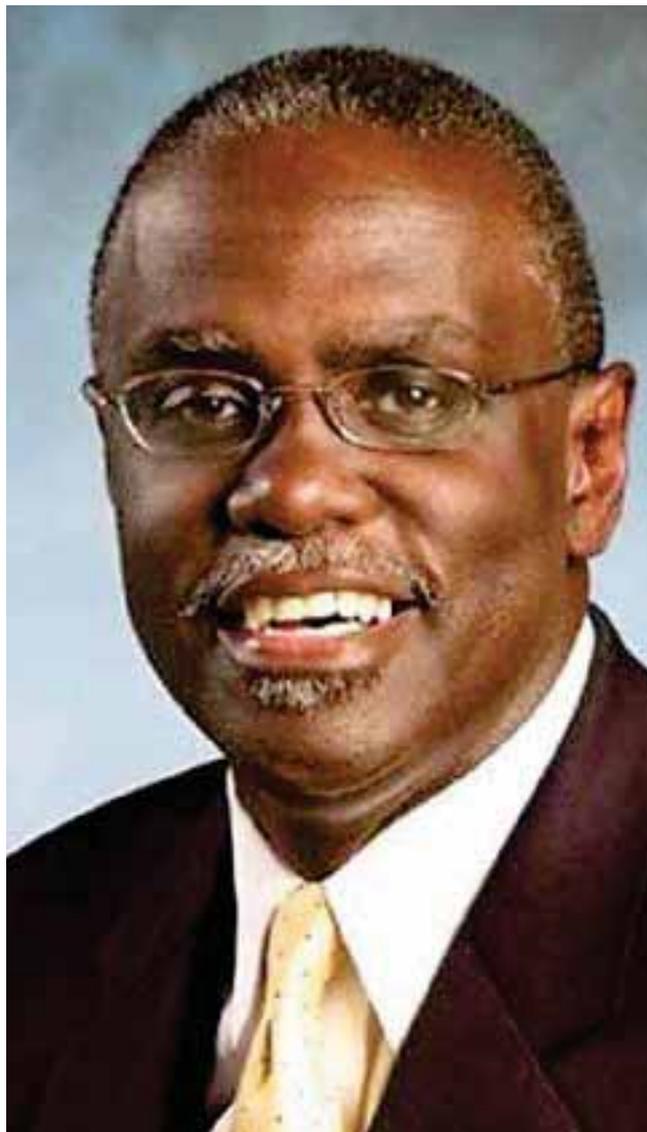
Mignon Payne
South Fulton



"I do not believe that sexual orientation should come into play with regards to an adoption agency making a decision as to who can or cannot adopt children. I think at the end of a day, what really matters is who can take care of the child. There's a vetting process that should be accomplished and gone through and if you can go through that successful, then you should be able to adopt a child regardless of your sexual orientation."

Compiled by Vincent Christie.

South Fulton: It's Bill vs Benny Voters in new cities go to the polls



William "Bill" Edwards (left) and Benny Crane (right) will squared off in a runoff April 18 to be the first mayor of the city of South Fulton.

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Mass Deportation Would Cost U.S. Economy Billions, Experts Say

BY BARRINGTON SALMON
(NNPA NEWSWIRE CONTRIBUTOR)

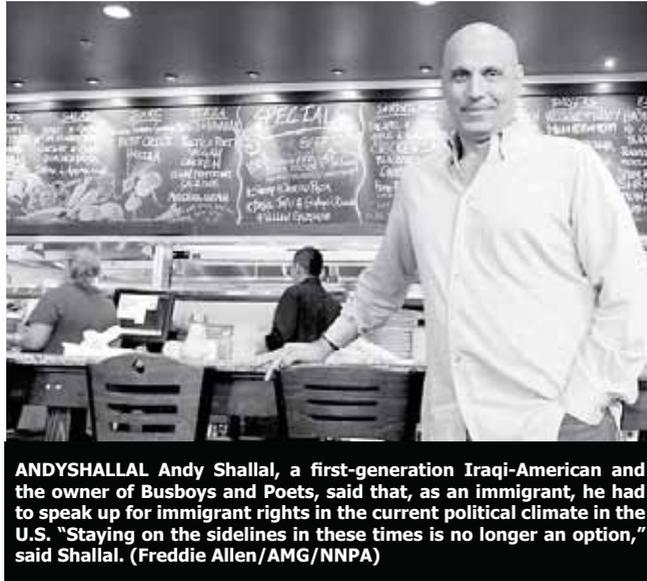
Immigration and labor experts say that mass deportation would cost the federal government nearly \$900 billion in lost revenue over 10 years and would immediately reduce the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) by 1.4 percent.

That GDP shortfall would grow by 2.6 percent, and reduce the cumulative GDP over 10 years by \$4.7 trillion. Overall, the U.S. economy would lose \$434.4 billion in GDP every year in losses in the construction, manufacturing, and leisure and hospitality industries, if unauthorized immigrants were forced to leave the country.

"This would cripple the economy," said Rita Medina, the immigrant campaign manager for the Center for American Progress Action Fund (CPAF). Medina said that a state law in Alabama forced agricultural workers to leave their jobs, which had a negative effect on crop yields and the economy. "It takes a toll on communities. People are moving, because of the fear of [Immigration Customs Enforcement] and taking their children out of school. Small businesses and the housing market will be deeply affected."

Medina continued: "It's pretty scary. It's also important to make sure that we're not causing panic."

Medina said that the updated 287(g) program in President Trump's memo on undocumented immigration, which deputizes state and local law enforcement officers



ANDYSHALLAL Andy Shallal, a first-generation Iraqi-American and the owner of *Busboys and Poets*, said that, as an immigrant, he had to speak up for immigrant rights in the current political climate in the U.S. "Staying on the sidelines in these times is no longer an option," said Shallal. (Freddie Allen/AMG/NNPA)

to act as ICE agents, is basically like the original program on steroids.

"With some of the policies, you can't say are they're unconstitutional, because they've been in place for a while," Medina explained. "I'm sure there are those in legal circles who are looking at options and ways to counter administration policy."

According to the National Restaurant Association and Restaurants Opportunities Centers United, estimated 1 in 4 restaurant workers is foreign-born. Immigrants comprise a significant majority of farm workers and many of them are undocumented.

During protests over President Donald Trump's immigration poli-

cies, hundreds of immigrants and their families marched to the White House, instead of going to work, shutting down more than 100 area restaurants in the Washington, D.C. metro area, to show what a day without immigrants in the workforce would look like. Demonstrations took place in cities around the country. In the district, protestors sought assurances from city officials that they would refuse requests from ICE to arrest and hold undocumented immigrants, demanded a halt to unchecked police violence committed against immigrants and asked for a fund to pay for a sanctuary program in the district.

For Andy Shallal, owner of

Busboys and Poets, standing in solidarity with the protesters was a no-brainer. He closed his six locations, gave his employees a paid day off and also gave them the option of coming into the restaurants to partake in other activities on that day.

"As an immigrant myself, I have to speak up," he said. "Staying on the sidelines in these times is no longer an option. We need true immigration reform that considers the human aspect of immigration—not just building walls, hiring agents, and expanding prisons."

Shallal, a first-generation Iraqi-American who is married to an Iranian immigrant, said that his restaurants serve about 4,000 to 5,000 people every day.

"We're sending a clear message that to hurt one is to hurt all. I stand with my customers, employees and immigrants," said Shallal. "All of us come from different parts. It's not possible to lose this. There are always people seeking sanctuary, refugees fleeing war and conflict. If you build a 20-foot wall, they'll find a 21-foot ladder."

Shallal's restaurants are sanctuaries and bastions of progressive thought and politics in the Washington, D.C., metro area. Shallal, who once hosted former President Barack Obama, said that the Trump Administration's rhetoric has produced a hostile and dangerous environment.

"All of us have concerns about going home because of the heated rhetoric, even those who didn't think about it. My wife is nervous about going home to see her fam-

ily during the Iranian New Year. It still feels like we're outsiders," said Shallal. "I don't know what's going to happen with the administration. The new executive order makes this much harder. It's very xenophobic and it's offensive."

Veteran trade unionist Dwight Kirk agreed with Shallal, echoing his friend's position that people of good conscience were being compelled to stand up to the forces of regression and oppression seeking to rollback more than half a century of social, political and economic gains.

"It's very, very inspiring to see what's happening. The struggle over immigration flows out of the 'Fight for \$15' movement, where immigrants and other workers are employed and being underpaid," Kirk explained. "These struggles have been generated over the past two years and flow naturally into immigrant rights. Around the country, labor unions are supporting these efforts."

Kirk said that the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants would "definitely be a hit to people's pockets and lower-income people would pay more for products."

"This will lower the standard of living in the U.S. I think we're going to see a gut check," said Kirk. "I anticipate restrictions on the workforce and reduction in the standard of living. Even under 'Reaganomics,' there wasn't this scale of pull-back."

2017 Does Not Have to be a Disaster Year

BY NATHANIEL SMITH

The spectacle that was the 2016 Presidential election is now a distant memory for many even though we are constantly reminded of its results. It feels as though every time we try to take a step away from national issues to focus on local opportunities, we are brought back by another Tweet, breaking news story, or painful conversation at our local barber shop, beauty salon or house of worship. The pull of the ongoing "political reality shows" witnessed at national, state and local levels threaten our collective belief in the possibility of transformative change. These concerns are made worse by the economic and cultural shifts occurring around us in our changing communities. That said, the bedrock of our public process – democracy – is not civic engagement alone. While engagement is important especially in these times, it is not the only ingredient required for a strong participatory democracy. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a champion of the vulnerable, rightly foretold, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who [vote] are prepared to choose wisely".

In this era of "fake news" and "alternative

facts" it is easy to become distracted from the issues that should matter to us most. As Atlantans prepare to elect a new Mayor and majority of the City Council seats on November 2, 2017, Our Future Atlanta (OFA) – a movement of Atlantans (grassroots organizations, neighborhood associations, NPOs, students, churches, commercial districts, philanthropies and volunteers like you) seek to organize, design, adopt and advance a multi-year quality of life (QoL) Policy Platform for the City of Atlanta. This coalition of diverse stakeholders is leading the charge to coalesce our individual and siloed efforts to create unity and common focus around a comprehensive quality of life agenda we can all advance during the next Mayoral administration.

Our Future Atlanta began in the fall of 2016 to amplify issues as diverse as affordable housing, renewable energy, public safety, economic inclusion, parks and greenspace, transportation, education and healthy food access. This effort has since grown to serve as a progressive clearing house for Atlantans to become involved in local policy making in ways unavailable to them in the past. Who better to advance the causes that are near and dear to our hearts than frontline organizations work-

ing to advocate for change today?

Our Future Atlanta is an historic opportunity that will make an unshakable impression throughout the 2017 election cycle and the term of our city's next mayor and beyond. OFA is led by the Partnership for Southern Equity, ProGA and the Center for Civic Innovation, who last month hosted the 2017 Atlanta Civic Summit to gather and engage community stakeholders around neighborhood issues that will be impacted by the 2017 local elections.

The Atlanta Civic Summit helped set the tone for how local leaders can help effectuate change in the upcoming elections, and hold our new mayor accountable. More importantly, via Our Future Atlanta, we now have more opportunities to engage in policy work and voter mobilization well in advance of early voting efforts.

Now more than ever, we must come together to create a unified equity agenda for Atlanta, a city once the beacon of the Civil Rights Movement now has the second-highest income inequality percentage of any city in America. At this unprecedented time in the history of our country, we must unite with a renewed sense of urgency around issues that

impact us all - our quality of life, our shared planet, our parents' and children's' future. The preservation of a healthy democracy requires that we find new common ground and forge new alliances.

Whether Atlanta will continue to our "Beloved City" will depend on the work we do today. There are many opportunities to get engaged including your participation on April 1, 2017 as the Partnership for Southern Equity and ATL Is Ready hosts "Ensuring Equity in Our Future Atlanta: Building on Existing Policy Platforms". Learn more, sign up to volunteer, host an event, and much more at www.atlisuready.black/ofta.

If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

Nathaniel Smith is the Founder and Chief Equity Officer of the Partnership for Southern Equity, which is pushing for a "new southern strategy" throughout the South that focuses on social justice and building an economy that works for everyone. Smith was named one of the "Eight Up-And-Coming Black Leaders In The Climate Movement" by Huffington Post in February of 2017.