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ACCA-AZ members meet politicians head on

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On September 8 over 120 people gathered at the largest membership meeting ever held by the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA)-Arizona Chapter.

Helping draw members were featured speakers Jim Pederson, Democratic US Senate candidate, incumbent Arizona Secretary of State Jan Brewer (R) and State Representative Russell Pearce (R).

Representative Pearce, who spoke first during the luncheon, is a controversial figure among trade organizations for being a sponsor of the Arizona Handyman Bill which recently increased from \$750 to \$1000 the limit before a contractor's license is required to perform services. Pearce is also attracting media attention for his strong positions on illegal immigration and he spent most of his time on this subject.

"It is time to wake up and put America first," said Pearce. "We don't need comprehensive immigration reform. We have plenty of laws. What we need is comprehensive enforcement."

Pearce advocates a widespread deportation plan for people who have entered the country illegally. He is also supporting upcoming Arizona ballot propositions which would automatically deny bail for illegal immigrants who commit certain felony crimes and one that would prohibit punitive damages being awarded to a plaintiff in a civil case if that person came to the United States illegally.

On the topic of increasing the limit for handyman work from \$750 to \$2500—which the bill originally proposed—Pearce insisted the increase should be made simply to account for inflation, since the limit has remained



Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate Jim Pederson (left) addresses ACCA-AZ members. Arizona Secretary of State Jan Brewer (middle) and State Representative Russell Pearce also spoke at the meeting.

the same for over 20 years. "I believe these people have an inherent right to do these small jobs," Pearce said.

According to ACCA-AZ Executive Director Antoine Coffey, "Our members are adamantly opposed to this."

Coffey said the two main concerns among the ACCA-AZ Board of Directors and membership to increasing the limit is consumer safety and a lack of financial recourse. "I know Mr. Pearce mentioned the court system for remedy, but the average homeowner would probably just let it go due to costs and the time it would take."

Coffey also noted that increasing the limit could very well increase the enticement for immigrants to work illegally.

ACCA-AZ member John Hansberger of Hansberger Refrigeration drove up from Yuma so he could address Pearce directly.

"Seventy five percent of my serv-

ice business is under \$2500," said Hansberger, who added that the increase would promote "a bunch of guys out there in their pickups doing a shoddy job."

ACCA-AZ is part of the Construction Trade Coalition (CTC), which is made up of several Arizona trade associations. CTC lobbyist Barry Aarons helps CTC fight against legislation harmful to contractors.

After some lively debate between a few ACCA-AZ members and Pearce, Jan Brewer addressed the group, discussing some of her experiences as Arizona's Secretary of State.

Brewer was followed by an address by Jim Pederson, who told members "I feel like I am at home," as he has worked many years as a developer, working with contractors.

Originally, both Israel Torres, the former ROC Director who is running

against Brewer this November for Secretary of State, and Pederson's opponent incumbent U.S. Senator John Kyle (R-Arizona) were planning on attending the meeting to participate in a platform discussion panel, but they were unable to attend. Both have been invited to attend the October 11 ACCA-AZ membership meeting.

"We want our members to know who their elected officials are, and if they have questions, to be able to ask them directly," said Coffey.

ACCA-AZ has experienced a 40% increase in membership over the last two years. Currently the association has 120 contractor members, 70 associate members and 40 affiliate members.

At the upcoming ACCA-AZ Annual Dinner on November 10, the ACCA National President and CEO Paul Stalknecht will be the keynote speaker.