Immigration law halted in its tracks
Arizona governor, supporters vow to keep fighting

BY JACQUES BILLAUD and AMANDA LEE MYERS
Associated Press Phoenix

PHOENIX — A federal judge stepped into the fight over Arizona’s immigration law at the last minute Wednesday, blocking the heart of the measure and defusing a confrontation between police and thousands of activists that had been building for months.

Coming just hours before the law was to take effect, the ruling isn’t the end.

It sets up a lengthy legal battle that could end up before the Supreme Court — ensuring that a law that rezoned the immigration debate, inspired similar measures nationwide, created fodder for political campaigns and raised tensions with Mexico will stay in the spotlight.

Protesters who gathered at the state Capitol and outside the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City cheered when they heard the news. The governor, the law’s authors and anti-immigration groups vowed to fight on.

“It’s a temporary bump in the road,” Gov. Jan Brewer said.

The key issue before U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton in the case is as old as the nation itself: Does federal law trump state law in Brewer’s case?

The Clinton administration put on hold until the issues, including officers

“I knocked on the window to get her attention. I yelled, ‘The car’s on fire!’”

Neil Oldaker, who pulled a woman from her burning car at restaurant

HEROISM SERVED AT DRIVE-THROUGH

Vancouver firefighters provide an initial attack on fire at the Rose Village McDonald’s just after 11 a.m. Wednesday. The fire caused $1 million in damage.

Man pulls woman, 80, from burning vehicle at McDonald’s

BY LAURA MCVICKER and BOB ALBRECHT
Columbian staff writers

Neil Oldaker was in the McDonald’s restaurant drive-through when he saw flames under the white sedan in front of his truck.

The flames were quickly moving up the sides of the car. But the driver, waiting to get her food at the window, didn’t seem to notice. So Oldaker swung into action. “I knocked on the window to get her attention. I yelled, ‘The car’s on fire!’ But she seemed confused,” he said.

So Oldaker dragged the 80-year-old woman from the car just as flames spread to the McDonald’s restaurant, ripping through the kitchen and gutting the building’s interior.

Wednesday’s lunchtime blaze caused $1 million in damage to the McDonald’s, forced a daylong evacuation of the restaurant and snarled traffic around Fourth Plain Boulevard for hours.

Fortunately, no one, including the driver of the sedan, was seriously hurt.

The fire at the restaurant at 2110 E. Fourth Plain Blvd. was gutted.

New crossing won’t fuel sprawl in Clark County, analysis concludes

EYRIK BRAGDON
Columbian staff writer

A new analysis concludes that the Columbia River Crossing won’t fuel sprawl in Clark County, assuming the new bridge comes with tolls and an extension of Portland’s light rail transit system into Vancouver.

The conclusion seemed to ally the concerns of at least one elected official who has grown increasingly critical of the project this year.

Metro council President David Bragdon said his gut feeling had been that the bigger bridge would fuel a new land rush in Clark County, where a third of the work force already crosses the river to work in Oregon. Bragdon and Portland Mayor Sam Adams expressed concern that a 10- or 12-lane replacement wouldn’t do any good if it quickly clogged the freeway with even more commuters from Clark County.

The analysis concluded that the big bridge would increase growth pressure in Clark County, but that pressure would be offset by the imposition of tolls.

The toll is assumed to be $2 each way.

Bragdon said the new analysis moves him closer to supporting the $3.5 billion project than ever. “Certainly easier,” Bragdon said.

Four months later...
congress grows gap in crime sentence
By JIM ABRAMS
Associated Press writer
WASHINGTON — Congress on Wednesday changed a quarter-century-old law that has subjected tens of thousands of blacks to long prison terms for crack cocaine convictions while giving far milder treatment to those, mainly whites, caught with the powder form of the drug.

The measure changes a 1986 law, enacted at a time when crack cocaine use was rampant and considered a particularly violent drug, under which a person convicted of crack cocaine possession gets the same mandatory prison term as someone who possesses 100 times as much.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, and passed by the Senate in December, is expected to be considered by the House this week. If passed, it would go to President Barack Obama to sign into law.

The Senate measure would give retroactive effect to the change, meaning those who had already served time could have their sentences reduced or even eliminated.

The legislation, which is also supported by the Justice Department, is part of a broader effort to address the war on drugs and the impact it has had on minorities.

Critics say the law has had a disproportionate impact on African Americans, who are more likely to be convicted of crack cocaine crimes.

The bill would make the mandatory minimum sentence for crack cocaine offenses 10 years for those convicted of possessing 5 grams of crack cocaine, compared to the current 20-year mandatory minimum sentence.

Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., ranking minority member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the bill was a step forward in addressing the disparity in sentences for crack cocaine offenses.

"This is an important step," Sessions said in a statement. "It will help ensure that our justice system is fair and that it does not discriminate against African Americans.

Sessions said the bill would ensure that the federal government does not "criminalize" the use of a drug that is more dangerous than the powder form of cocaine.

The bill would also allow for the release of those who have already served time for crack cocaine offenses, provided they have served at least 15 years and have demonstrated good behavior.

"This bill will help to correct a wrong that has been done to many innocent people," Sessions said.

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