

Below is a transcript of a radio program called "This American Life." It is broadcasted on NPR on Saturdays and hosted by Ira Glass. If you want the HEAR the broadcast click on <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/458/play-the-part> Kate

Alien Experiment. (about life in Alabama since the state legislature passed anti-immigrant legislation that's more severe than Arizona's. A similar bill is making its way through the Missouri legislature)

Ira Glass

The Obama administration has deported undocumented immigrants at a greater rate than any previous administration. It was 392,862 immigrants in 2010, over a million since he took office, which means that he's on track to deport more people in four years than the Bush administration did in eight. The Obama administration has also issued 10 times more in fines to employers who knowingly hire illegal workers.

But as a country, we are still in this weird limbo of having no coherent or effective national strategy to deal with the 11 million people who are in the country illegally. For a long time, there's been two camps when it comes to this issue. There's the zero tolerance people, who want to round them all up and kick them all out. And then there are other people who want leniency, a pathway to citizenship.

But now there is this third way. There's this new movement that has popped up in states like Arizona and Alabama. It's formally called attrition through enforcement. But casually, proponents use a phrase that you may have heard, self-deportation. The idea is, make life so difficult, so unpleasant for illegal immigrants, that they choose to go home. They self-deport. Jack Hitt went to the place that has been trying this out since October, Alabama.

Jack Hitt

When Arizona passed its notorious immigration bill in 2010, there was outrage and a national debate about whether it had crossed some constitutional line. Then, last summer, Alabama went way, way beyond that, passing the most sweeping immigration bill in the country. I went down there, hearing that the law was causing no small amount of chaos. I wondered if they'd accidentally created more problems for themselves than they'd solved.

You may have seen reports of desperate farmers complaining that their crops were rotting in the fields. Tomatoes, blueberries, squash, unpicked as workers fled the state. Members of the military who couldn't prove citizenship were frustrated in the simplest thing, like registering a boat. The Alabama Department of Revenue sidestepped certain provisions of the law so people wouldn't be thrown out of their homes. Frightened Latino parents kept thousands of students home from schools. Outraged principals rose up against the law. A 12-year-old I met, named Stephanie, told me about an assembly in her school.

Stephanie

They started talking about how they're going to take illegal Mexicans out of school. They were talking about that if they do take our parents, we're OK, because they could send us to Mexico with them. Almost everybody was crying.

Jack Hitt

The new law is designed to work like this. Turn almost every encounter between a regular person and a government official into a checkpoint, and the illegals will leave on their own accord. That's self-deportation. Alabama's law, known as HB56, does this by enlisting every local and state police officer into the work of busting undocumented aliens.

It also requires every state and local bureaucrat to first make sure you're legal before having any, quote, "transaction with a citizen." This includes everything from getting a hunting license to a mobile home registration

sticker, to getting a death certificate. Undocumented kids can still attend public school. But administrators have to determine the immigration status of all new students.

The law also makes it a crime for any citizen to knowingly hire or even help an undocumented worker in any way. The Home Builders Association of Alabama, the US Chamber of Commerce, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and other local business groups came out against the law, because it created heaps of new paperwork and made the state look like a bad place to invest.

Gerald Dial

This bill was so far-reaching and so much unintended consequences out of it that continues to surface.

Jack Hitt

This is Gerald Dial, the Republican whip in the state Senate, who helped pass the new law and now regrets it. He worries that new businesses are going to stay away.

Gerald Dial

I understand economic recruiting. And I say often that economic recruiting is more ruthless than quarterback recruiting for colleges. They'll use anything against you. And other states will begin to say, hey, you don't want to go to Alabama now.

If we're teetering out there, it's us and another, and everything's pretty even, we're probably going to lose those people. We won't know about it. It won't be a big red flag-- hey, we didn't go to Alabama. We're going to go to Arkansas, or we're going to go to South Carolina because of this. But those things are going to impact on people. And that's probably the most detrimental part of the whole bill.

Jack Hitt

The guy who runs Alabama's retirement system, David Bronner, declared in November that the new law was already chilling foreign investment. An \$80 million Birmingham office tower, planned by a Spanish mega-bank, BBVA Group, had been scrapped. And the Chinese backers of a new copper plant in Thomasville were having second thoughts, Bronner said.

Nine days later, the morning I arrived in Birmingham, the six-column headline screaming across the front page of the paper was, "Mercedes manager arrested under immigration law." The first newsworthy bust of this law was not a tractor-trailer filled with Mexican workers, but a German executive named Detlev Hager, who was seized and detained for not having the proper papers. It was the talk of the town all day. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* later published an editorial poking fun at Alabama for its southern inhospitality and invited Mercedes to move its plant to Missouri. "We are the Show-Me State," it said, "not the 'Show me your papers' state."

A week later, another auto executive was stopped at a police checkpoint, this one from Honda. He was carrying an international driver's license, a passport, and a work permit. But it wasn't enough. The governor, Robert Bentley, freaked out. He held a press conference to let foreign executives know that they were still welcome in Alabama. "People just need to calm down," he said. "Everything's going to be OK."

I spoke with Steven Anderson, the police chief in Tuscaloosa, whose officer stopped the Mercedes executive. I figured he might be defensive about the arrest, considering it made national news and embarrassed the governor. But from his point of view, the situation was straightforward.

Steven Anderson

Officer made a traffic stop on a vehicle because it did not have a license plate displayed on the vehicle. The officer subsequently, under 32-6-9, was required to take that individual into custody.

Jack Hitt

If those same circumstances were to happen this afternoon, would the executive be brought before a magistrate again? I mean, is that the process now?

Steven Anderson

Yes. If the situation were to arise again, we would handle it just as we handled it.

Jack Hitt

Back before the law, the officer could have issued a quick citation to the German executive on the side of the road.

Steven Anderson

And be done with it in about a 15- to 20-minute traffic stop.

Jack Hitt

Versus?

Steven Anderson

Versus having to spend two or three hours with an individual while we determine whether they're here legally or not.

Jack Hitt

Chief Anderson tells me flat-out, he thinks this is a waste of resources, something his officers shouldn't be doing. But they have no choice, because the new law makes immigration a primary mission for police. Legislators put language into the law that allows any citizen to sue the police if they are caught not enforcing the immigration provision.

Steven Anderson

To me, that just screamed of the fact that they understood that they had to have some type of sanctions out there to hold law enforcement's feet to the fire on this, because we wouldn't make this a priority if they didn't.

Jack Hitt

And why wouldn't they make it a priority? Because there's actual crime in Tuscaloosa.

Steven Anderson

And I'll tell you what. The Hispanic population was not the population in our community that was committing those crimes. So immigration was not a problem for our police department. It was not in my top 10, maybe not even in my top 20, of concerns that I had for the city of Tuscaloosa.

Jack Hitt

Not in the top 20 for many reasons. But here's one. There just aren't that many immigrants in Alabama. It's not like Arizona, where a third of the state is Latino. In Alabama, the number is less than 4%. And yet, rooting out illegal immigrants is now a priority across the state.

The law is so comprehensive that some officials seem to be overreaching, just to be on the safe side. An attorney told me about one guy being denied a jailhouse phone call, since use of the phone was considered a business transaction, and about a victim of domestic violence who was told by a judge that if she wanted a protective order, she might open herself up for deportation.

But what I found most surprising was that amid the chaos, regular Alabamians, here and there, were taking the law to heart, pursuing ad hoc immigration justice on their own. I met a young Costa Rican woman named Carolina who long ago overstayed her visa. She told me about a recent time at a grocery store checkout. She and her husband tried to pay for their food with a credit card and valid ID. The cashier refused them, saying they'd first have to show that they were here legally.

Carolina

I swear, they don't want to sell us the groceries.

Jack Hitt

Carolina had just had a birthday when we met. And her mother back home had wired her some money to buy a gift, a money gram she could pick up at Walmart, not a government office, but a private business. So no problem. She'd done this many, many times in the nearly seven years she's lived in Alabama. Before the law, all she had to do was show ID and type in the secret PIN number her mother had sent her. But this time--

Carolina

They did not give me the money. They just refused to give me the money, because I cannot prove to the girl that I was legal. And I don't know why I have to prove her that.

Jack Hitt

Again, this is not part of the law.

Carolina

So I tried a lot with her. I was dealing with her for about 15 minutes. But she says no. So I went already to three different Walmarts. And I don't have my money yet.

Jack Hitt

When we asked Walmart about this, a spokesperson said their procedures for getting a money gram are the same at every store nationwide and don't require proof of citizenship. Another provision of the law makes any contract with an undocumented alien unenforceable in court. Some people are using it to mess with illegal immigrants. Mary Bauer is a lawyer with the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Mary Bauer

Certainly, people have been told that they're not going to be able to rent housing anymore. That's something that's been very common. Some workers have been told that they're not going to get paid for the work they've already done, because that would be an illegal contract.

Jack Hitt

Before the law, undocumented people like Carolina expected certain bureaucratic inconveniences. She couldn't get a water bill in her own name. And sure, she had to be careful in certain situations. She worried what would happen if she were pulled over by a traffic cop.

But by and large, life was predictable. It wasn't scary. The intention of the law is to take all that away, to make life uncomfortable. And it's working. Now Carolina told me that before she drives anywhere in a car, she says a prayer.

She has appointed a legal guardian, an American, for her three-year-old son, in case she disappears into an immigration holding cell. At least she'll know that her son won't wind up in foster care. And recently, she made a decision. Her son loves preschool. He's a smart kid. And he's got a lot of friends there. But getting caught on the road now on the drive back and forth to school is too risky.

Carolina

And actually, this is the last month that my son is going to school, because he's not safe with me to take him to school. And he's going to be safe in here, at home.

Jack Hitt

For a lot of Latinos who've decided to stay in Alabama, life has become about hunkering down, waiting and seeing. I went to a mobile home park where a lot of undocumented immigrants live, and spent a day with a mother named Gabriella. Like Carolina, she's afraid to drive now. But she's taken it one step further. She's quit her job and almost never goes out.

Gabriella

And I had to be here, hide in my own home, because I need to stay here for my children when they come back from the school.

Jack Hitt

Folks like Gabriella have another strategy, too-- try not to encounter white people at all. They only shop at Hispanic markets. Carolina told me that when she does go to a regular grocery store now, she wanders up and down the cashier area, hoping to catch a subtle smile before getting into a checkout line.

Another mobile homeowner told me he'd heard of a friendly clerk in a neighboring town who would renew mobile home licenses without asking too many questions. Others said they've created an underground railroad of information about sympathetic folks and make contact with faith groups that defiantly provide workers rides to their jobs. Gabriella said that the new attitude has permeated every aspect of her life, every aspect.

Gabriella

Even in the church.

Jack Hitt

Really?

Gabriella

Yes, because even in the church, you find people that say, well, we are in God's house. And then they don't want to talk at you. And they don't want to give the peace to you. That is so sad.

Jack Hitt

So in your church, you have the passing of the peace, that part of the service? And so in your church, when they do that, what normally happens? You turn and shake hands with people?

Gabriella

Yes. They shake hands and everything. But now I found some people that say, I don't want to do peace with you.

Jack Hitt

Every Latino person, legal or illegal, whom I spoke to noted at some point that there's just something hateful in the air now. Before the law, they felt accepted. They had American friends. They didn't feel out of place.

Now when they go to a store, every single one of them told me they feel that people are looking at them weirdly, like, what are you still doing here? When the law changed to make them less welcome, they actually became less welcome, in a day-to-day, "passing you on the street" sort of way. School kids told me they're fighting off comments like, I'm glad you're all moving, we don't want you here, you take our jobs. At a pep rally, where Latinos were all sitting up front, kids started shouting, Mexicans move to the back. And most of them did.

Jack Hitt

How many people have left your class?

Stephanie

There's missing about at least five in each one of my classes.

Jack Hitt

Are there friends of yours?

Stephanie

Yeah.

Jack Hitt

This is Stephanie. She was hanging out with Gabriella's daughter and some other kids in the back of Gabriella's trailer, playing video games while their parents held a prayer meeting in the other room, hoping for repeal of the new law. We talked about all the kids that had left her school since October.

Stephanie

It was really hard to let them go, mostly because they were girls. One of the names was Jessie. She was my best friend. But she had to leave because of the law. So what we did, we went to the movies before she left. And the day that she left, I went to the store and bought her a teddy bear. We started to cry.

Jack Hitt

When was that?

Stephanie

Two weeks ago.

Jack Hitt

And where did she move to?

Stephanie

She moved to Mexico.

Jack Hitt

And what did she tell you about Mexico?

Stephanie

She said that it's funner than here. She said that she can move around. Her parents let her go out more, because they're not scared that immigration or something, that she can just be free, go out to the mall by herself, because here, we can't do that without getting in trouble or something.

Jack Hitt

Stephanie says that. But the adults, in fact, are terrified of Mexico. They read the papers, too, and hear of dead bodies found in playgrounds, revenge killings, random murders. If the new law brings more pressure on them, the grown-ups say, they might move to another state, but not to Mexico.

Here's Gabriella again. A friend of hers did go back to Mexico just after the law passed.

Gabriella

And I even called her last week. She was crying, because she never thought Mexico was so scary. And she told me, I prefer to be there, waiting for the police to catch me. But here, I'm afraid. And they are going to kill my children or me.

Jack Hitt

Besides the fear, Gabriella's like any mom. Her kids are Americans. They were born here. Their friends are all here. Alabama's their home. She doesn't want to uproot them or herself. We met in November, in her living room. Earlier this week, as I was finishing this story, I found out that Gabriella's husband was arrested and deported. She and her children have moved to Mexico.

Scott Beason

All these bills are designed for people to say, you know what, they're going to try to enforce the law here in this state. And maybe we need to move back to our home country. Or maybe we need to move to a state that has its arms wide open for illegal aliens.

Jack Hitt

Senator Scott Beason is the Republican leader in the state legislature. And he was the primary sponsor of the bill last year. As far as he's concerned, the law is working spectacularly well. In just three months, it's prompted massive self-deportation, roughly 75,000 people. And, Beason says, this has opened up jobs for American citizens, just like lawmakers hoped it would.

Scott Beason

Of course, it only went into effect October 1. We've already seen a tremendous drop in our unemployment numbers. In the month of October alone, while the country averaged a tenth of 1% drop, Alabama had five times that. And that's corrected seasonal numbers. So we're very proud of what the legislation has done already.

Jack Hitt

Given those numbers, Beason has every right to be proud. He's saying Alabama shaved half a percentage point off the unemployment rolls in October, while the national average was a piddly one-tenth of 1%. And that's in a place that ranks among the lowest states in terms of illegal immigration. If Beason's right, then a quick solution to this unending recession and its high unemployment would be an anti-immigration bill like Alabama's in every state. Jobs, Beason told me, were the main reason he drafted this bill.

Scott Beason

I would probably say one of the most moving stories is, back in 2008, we had started the immigration commission. And we were in Huntsville, Alabama. And there was a woman who came up. I don't know her name. I'd never seen her before and never seen her again. My guess is she was in some sort of maid service, custodial service.

She came up to the table and said, Senator-- she was beginning to cry-- she said, I just want to let you know that in the job service I'm in, a lot of my competition has begun to hire people who aren't supposed to be here at all. They're here illegally. Because of that competition, I can't find work. I've lost my clients. And I have just paid my house payment on my credit card.

When I tell that story today, it still breaks my heart. And I decided that was one of the main things. I've been interested in this issue. But this is the kind of thing that cannot be allowed. We were elected to stand up for that lady. And if I ever get a little deterred about what we're trying to do, I think about that lady's face, the story she told me. I've never talked to her again. And I hope that now that we've done something, that we've helped her.

Jack Hitt

Whether he's helped her is unclear, because when it comes to the impressive unemployment numbers Beason cites, there's a catch. Other than Beason and his strongest supporters, I could not find anyone else who attributed the drop in unemployment to the new law.

The director of economic forecasting at the University of Alabama, Ahmad Ijaz, he didn't. In fact, he said that most of the job growth last year was in the automotive sector. You don't find many illegal workers in those Mercedes and Honda plants. He went on to say that the other area of growth this fall was retail, probably due to the seasonal Christmas bump. And Ijaz says there wasn't any job growth in sectors where Latinos typically work-- agriculture, poultry processing, and construction.

So how did immigration become the hottest political topic in a state with relatively few illegal immigrants? It wasn't much of an issue at all in Alabama until 2010, when Beason and his fellow Republicans put it on the agenda in a big way way. They campaigned on a set of promises they called "the Republican handshake," five pledges to voters, including combating illegal immigration.

The Alabama legislature has been dominated by Democrats since the Civil War. But the handshake worked. Republicans gained super majorities in both chambers of Alabama's legislature. They essentially could pass anything they wanted. And they had a mandate from the people. Democrats say the people had little to do with it.

Joe Hubbard

I did not once hear about immigration when I was on the campaign trail. Now, keep in mind I live in an urban district. But it seemed to me to be more of a political issue than a practical issue.

Jack Hitt

Joe Hubbard is a conservative Democrat for Montgomery. He was also elected in 2010. He says that the immigration issue represents a fundamental change in the way Alabama politicians run for state office, one that's been in the works for years.

Joe Hubbard

In the past decade or so, before 2010, your state legislator was as local a politician as you got. He was the guy that you talked to about schools. He was the guy that you talked to about funding for that road project you need. And so the legislature was, in essence, a very local race.

I think from 2004 to 2006, and ultimately in 2010, you saw efforts by the Alabama Republican Party to nationalize local elections and to talk about what's going on in DC, the congressional Democrats, Nancy Pelosi, on and on. I think there was polling that showed immigration, which heretofore has been a national issue, could make for good state political fodder.

Jack Hitt

And when it came to actually writing the immigration bill, Hubbard says, the Alabama Republicans seemed to listen not so much to local voters, but to strategists in the National Republican Party.

Joe Hubbard

And I think Alabama, perhaps, has become a state where the National Party could try out some legislative experiments to see how they'd work in other states. I'm not sure. But that appears to be the case on immigration.

And I know for a fact that an attorney from the Midwest actually drafted the legislation that the state legislature passed. The bill that came out of conference committee was not drafted by any Alabama legislator. It was drafted by an attorney. And his name escapes me right now.

Kris Kobach

My name is Kris Kobach. And I'm Secretary of State of the state of Kansas.

Jack Hitt

And he's the mastermind of attrition through enforcement. You might not have heard of him, but he's an up-and-coming Republican star. He was campaigning with Mitt Romney in South Carolina all last week. He's helped write different immigration bills in cities and states all over the country-- Pennsylvania, Texas, Missouri, Nebraska, Utah. And he wrote Arizona's law.

Jack Hitt

So some folks, on the weekends, they go into their garage and fiddle with their car. You go into your garage and fiddle with immigration law.

Kris Kobach

Yeah. People do with their spare time what they feel fulfilled in. And so some people golf. Some people work on their car in the garage. I go into my home office and start typing away on the computer and trying to help states do what they can to restore the rule of law.

Jack Hitt

And if you're starting a new movement, Kris Kobach is who you want to have as your spokesman-- Harvard undergrad, master's degree from Oxford, Yale law. He's young. He has three adorable children. He is ruggedly handsome in a "TV superhero, rip off his shirt" sort of way. And in the final days, as the Alabama immigration bill came close to a final vote, the lawmakers wanted his help. Even though Kobach already had plans, he's not the kind of man to turn his back on legislators in distress.

Kris Kobach

I had already scheduled a turkey hunt and was going to be in Gardner, Kansas, looking to call in and shoot a tom turkey, and realized that if I wanted to get this work done, I'd have to do it while in the turkey blind or just give up on the hunting. So I got in the blind, took my laptop computer, took my shotgun, and got all set up and had a good, fully charged battery, and just started working on the final amendments to the bill. And fortunately I did that, because the turkey didn't show up that day. So I had something else to do. Maybe it was the clicking on the keyboard that scared them away.

Jack Hitt

For Kobach, the passage of HB56 was the culmination of years of work. He'd been drafting and trying out different laws in other places, seeing if they'd hold up in court, revising, trying them again. Then a few years ago, he met Senator Beason at a conservative conference. They collaborated on an anti-illegal immigration bill that went nowhere.

Then in 2010, with new super majorities in the Alabama legislature, they could try everything on their immigration wish list, even things Republicans didn't get into the Arizona law, that immigration data would be collected on all entering schoolchildren, that every business transaction with the state would require a birth certificate. After much of Alabama's bill held up in court, Kobach felt he'd finally had a template for other states to adopt. Kobach has been working on illegal immigration since 2001. His big insight came right after 9/11, when he was working for the Justice Department.

Kris Kobach

It was an a-ha moment when I realized that five of the 19 hijackers were in the country illegally. Four of those five had traffic violations while they were illegally in the country. And if the police officer had had that information at his fingertips, he could have made an arrest.

Jack Hitt

But cops don't check for immigration status. Immigration agents do. The problem was, there were only a few thousand of them. Kobach realized what we need is what war planners call a force multiplier. What if we enlisted the more than 700,000 state and local law enforcement officers across the country into the fight against illegal immigration?

The simplicity of Kobach's argument is what's so appealing. He isn't creating new policy at all. He's simply empowering states to enforce what is already in the federal statutes.

Kris Kobach

And from the alien's perspective, it's better, too. He can depart the United States on his own, freely, without ever being in custody. And so there's more liberty for him. And there's less cost for the United States.

Jack Hitt

There's less cost, because if someone self-deports, there's no arrest. There's no detention or immigration hearing. Attrition through enforcement sounds so rational, so clean, when Kobach explains it, like it'll happen automatically. You don't have to do much. They'll just go.

But of course, the reality of self-deportation is much messier than that. You're threatening to separate parents and kids, drive them from their homes. It's completely primal, the things that terrify us most. And that is the actual plan, to scare them.

I asked Kobach, point by point, about the unintended consequences of the Alabama bill. He disputed everything. Did it hurt business? Did it create chaos in the schools? All overstated, he said. Finally, I asked him if it unearthed long-sequestered racial attitudes aimed at Latinos.

Kris Kobach

I think it's really an argument of last resort. And that is, well, if you start enforcing immigration laws more aggressively, that's going to become a racially charged issue. And my answer is, no, it's not. I don't buy it. And frankly, that hasn't happened.

Jack Hitt

Well, you must know that there are people in Alabama who are saying unholy things as a result of this law, no?

Kris Kobach

Well, I don't think it's fair to say as a result of the law. You can't legislate what is in people's hearts. And if people have those twisted ideas of the world and have those ill feelings toward people who have a different skin color, I don't think you can say that the law has caused that. And I don't think you can say that the law can ultimately stop that. I would also say that Alabama's reputation has also increased around the country, too. There are many legislators in other states that are saying, they've really done something great.

Jack Hitt

Do you think there have been any unintended consequences from this bill?

Kris Kobach

No, not really. I mean, there have been some minor misinterpretations by one or two local officials of how they read the language. But that's inevitable with any state law.

Jack Hitt

Which brings us back to State Senator Gerald Dial, the Republican whip you heard earlier, who's worried about scaring away business. He's leading a campaign to, as he puts it, "tweak the law," in all sorts of ways. Here's a big one. He wants to get rid of this idea that any attempt to help people who might be illegal is itself illegal. That bothers him enormously. He's a devout Christian, so he wants to insert a Good Samaritan provision to protect good, charitable folks who are just practicing their faith.

Gerald Dial

I had a man who runs a soup kitchen, feeds people just off the street, call me and said, that's just terrible, because I feed people. And I don't stop the door and say, are you here illegally or legal? I feed you because you're hungry. And so that's a compassionate thing. And that's the Christian thing to do. And we're going to put that part into the bill also.

Jack Hitt

OK. So once you've amended the bill, do you think Jesus would vote for the bill?

Gerald Dial

Gosh, you've asked me a tough question. I would hope that he would understand. I would say that, would he vote for the bill? Probably not. Probably not. If you just laid it all the way down, probably not.

Jack Hitt

Don't get Dial wrong. He still favors a strong law to encourage self-deportation. But he thinks the law that passed last session, the rush and reach of it, the stuff that got inserted last minute, and the stuff he was told that would be included but wasn't, is hurting the state.

Gerald Dial

I would not have voted for the bill had I understood the unintended consequences. There are others who would not have also. But you were locked into position, where you either vote for this, or you vote against it. And therefore, you're encouraging illegals.

So you're in a catch-22 as far as that goes. So to show that we were not [? illegals ?], we had to vote for the bill. But today, after hearing our constituents talk and after looking at the problem, we're going to try to fix some of those problems.

Jack Hitt

There is a bill, there is a proposed total repeal of HB56. If it just came down to keeping things the way they are or voting for total repeal, how would you vote?

Gerald Dial

Well, I would probably vote for the repeal. But the repeal bill's not going to get before us.

Jack Hitt

I asked Joe Hubbard, the Montgomery democrat, what he thought the chances were for repeal.

Joe Hubbard

Zero.

Jack Hitt

Republicans have been pounding this issue for too long to backtrack now. Besides, Hubbard says, they don't need to.

Joe Hubbard

The politics of this bill are very good for the Republicans, I think. A Republican operative told me the other day that this bill's polling very high in popularity in Alabama. Expect to see this same bill, HB56-- it's already been in South Carolina passed-- expect to see it in many other Republican-controlled legislatures.

Jack Hitt

Last week, Alabama's law made a national debut of sorts. Kris Kobach endorsed Mitt Romney. And the two spent time traveling South Carolina together, talking to voters about their new third way to reform immigration. Then this week, Romney introduced the idea during a Republican debate.

Mitt Romney

Well, the answer is self-deportation, which is people decide that they could do better by going home, because they can't find work here, because they don't have legal documentation to allow them to work here.

Man

Isn't that we have now? If somebody doesn't feel they have the opportunity in America, they can go back anytime they want to.

Mitt Romney

Yes, we'd have a card that indicates who's here legally. And if people--

Jack Hitt

You can hear the audience laughing a little. And Romney struggles a bit to explain what he means. It sounds preposterous. Why would anyone leave if they didn't have to? Within days, Newt Gingrich was slapping Romney around on the issue. Quote, "For Romney to believe that somebody's grandmother is going to be so cut off that she's going to self-deport, I mean, this is an Obama-level fantasy."

By Thursday's debate, Romney had his pitch down better, and Gingrich didn't come off as well. Even Rick Santorum chimed in. He was for self-deportation, too.

By the time the Republicans decide their nominee, voters will come to know the meaning of this word, and it will no doubt be part of the electoral shorthand. Repeal health care. Cut taxes. Reform Medicare. Self-deportation.

Ira Glass

Jack Hitt. He's got a new book coming out this spring, called *Bunch of Amateurs*. The Alabama legislature is going back into session February 7. They're planning to take up possible changes to the immigration law. Meanwhile, parts of the law have been suspended by the courts. Some provisions will come before the United States Supreme Court this term when it considers the constitutionality of the Arizona immigration law.