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RECALL ELECTION CLAIMS ARIZONA ANTI-IMMIGRATION CHAMPION

By Marc Lacey and Katharine Seelye
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MESA, Ariz. – For years, Russell Pearce, Arizona’s most powerful legislator and the architect of its tough immigration law, has sought to make life so uncomfortable for illegal immigrants in the state that they pack up and go.

But Mr. Pearce, known for his gruff, uncompromising manner, was the one sent packing on Tuesday after disgruntled voters in this suburban neighborhood outside Phoenix banded together to recall him from the State Senate and replace him with a more moderate Republican.

“I’m grateful for the battles that we’ve won,” said Mr. Pearce as election results showed his opponent, the first-time candidate Jerry Lewis, ousting him from office late Tuesday night. “If being recalled is the price for keeping one’s promises, then so be it.”

Latino advocates saw Mr. Pearce’s defeat, 53 percent to 45 percent, with some ballots still to be tallied, as a sign that Republican politicians like Mr. Pearce were pushing too far with their get-tough approach to illegal immigration and that there were consequences if they did not get in sync with voter concerns.

“This is a game-changer for Arizona, politically speaking,” said Representative Raúl Grijalva, Democrat of Tucson. “He’s been the author of so much of what’s been going on in this state. He’s used race and division to get elected, and now he’s gone.”

Some of his Republican colleagues, though, predicted that Mr. Pearce, given his hard-charging ways and the backing of the Tea Party movement, would find a way to return to politics – and that there were plenty of others, from Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County to Gov. Jan Brewer, who would press immigration in his absence.

“I’m not going to stop,” said Mr. Arpaio, who is known for his immigration raids and who was commiserating with Mr. Pearce, a longtime ally, on Tuesday night. “I’m going to do more.”

Mr. Pearce had been a sheriff’s deputy for 23 years before his election to the State Legislature in 2000, and his recent unpopularity was partly a result of his brusque demeanor, which resembled that of an annoyed beat cop during a traffic stop. But voters in east Mesa, a conservative, blue-collar district, also complained that he was consumed with one issue above all else.

One of his sons, a sheriff’s deputy at the time, was shot by an illegal immigrant, and Mr. Pearce argued that the state was being overrun by outlaws without papers. He was behind a 2004 ballot measure that required proof of legal residency for those receiving state services or voting. He championed a 2007 law that allowed the state to take the business licenses of firms that hired illegal immigrants.

But he became best known for his 2010 law, known as Senate Bill 1070, that would have, if a federal judge had not intervened, turned police officers throughout the state into de facto immigration agents. Despite fierce controversy, the law was popular in Arizona and beyond, and gave rise to copycat legislation in other states, including an even more stringent version in Alabama.

"We are in the front of the parade," Mr. Pearce is fond of saying.

It was Mr. Pearce's follow-up to the 2010 law that got him in trouble. This year, he drafted a proposal to compel medical personnel to question patients about their immigration status and school officials to do the same with students. He also championed stripping the citizenship of children born in the Arizona to illegal immigrants.

Arizona's business community, stung by boycotts of the state after passage of the 2010 law, rose up against Mr. Pearce. Some of his Republican colleagues withheld their support, which Mr. Pearce considered betrayal. He also saw some of his initiatives vetoed by Ms. Brewer, who had her differences with Mr. Pearce, especially given his comments that it was her support for his proposals that propelled her to victory last November.

"He engaged in a bullying type of politics," said Randy Parraz, a Democrat who founded Citizens for a Better Arizona, the group that organized the campaign against Mr. Pearce.

During the campaign, backers of Mr. Pearce helped a Mexican immigrant, Olivia Cortes, put her name on the ballot to siphon votes away from Mr. Lewis, but the tactic appeared to backfire.

Many of those who supported the ouster of Mr. Pearce had been his supporters in past elections.

"I'm a sort of redneck conservative, but for me he just went way too far on immigration," said Tyler Montague, who like Mr. Pearce and Mr. Lewis is a member of Mesa's influential Mormon Church. "I agree that we can't have everyone from the third world coming here, but it began to feel like he hated these people, and I don't. They go to our churches. I know some of them."

Mr. Lewis, a charter school executive who is fluent in Spanish, said he would be more amenable to compromise, on immigration and everything else, than the man he is replacing.

"What this says is that people, wherever they are, want their politicians to be responsive to them and listen to them and react when they say, 'You may be going too far,' " Mr. Lewis said.

Despite tossing Mr. Pearce out of office, voters elsewhere showed little inclination to get rid of incumbents. Several big-city mayors were re-elected, even though most cities have been especially burdened by the sour economy.

In Houston, Mayor Annise Parker overcame low approval ratings and anti-gay attacks to hold on to office, but just barely. Ms. Parker, a lesbian, won with about 51 percent of the vote against five challengers. Mayors in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Indianapolis coasted to re-election.

In San Francisco, Edwin M. Lee, the interim mayor, became the city's first elected Chinese-American mayor, according to unofficial results Wednesday. The city is one-quarter ethnic Chinese and has the country's oldest Chinatown.

In Iowa, Republicans failed to win control of the State Senate.

In Virginia, the Republican drive to take over that state's Senate — and thereby take complete control of the state government — was teetering on the brink. In one district, the Republican candidate held an edge of just 86 votes, which will almost certainly lead to a recount that could take weeks. If the Republican wins, control of the Senate will be split in a 20-20 tie with Democrats. The lieutenant governor — a Republican — can cast tie-breaking votes, but his party had hoped to come away with a cleaner victory.

In Mississippi, about 60 percent of voters rejected the "personhood" amendment that would have banned all abortions and some forms of contraception.

Mississippi voters overwhelmingly approved a measure to require that prospective voters obtain a government-issued photo identification card if they do not have a driver's license or passport. The ID card will be free, but critics say the measure is still onerous because it will likely require voters to produce a birth certificate and Social Security card to obtain the new card.