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Rally Against Illegal Immigration Scheduled

Radio Hosts Enlisted in Effort, Which Is Aimed at Rousing Area Activists Before Week of Lobbying

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As the debate over immigration reform takes shape in Congress, radio talk show hosts will headline a rally against illegal immigration across from the [White House](#) today as a preamble to a week of lobbying on [Capitol Hill](#).

Organizers hope the radio personalities, whose shows across the country often are forums for heated anti-immigrant rhetoric, will galvanize an array of groups into a potent force. The effort is aimed at reflecting grass-roots concerns raised by Washington area residents, such as over job centers for mostly immigrant day laborers in Herndon and [Gaithersburg](#).

"We all see the illegal aliens marching down the streets, screaming, 'We are America' and 'We demand citizen status.' We are trying to offer a venue where Americans can come and express their support for secure borders and a sensible application of existing laws," said D.A. King, an ex-Marine from [Georgia](#) who leads the Dustin Inman Society, which is sponsoring the rally.

Surveys show that a majority of Americans favor tightening security along the border with Mexico. But the public is divided on how to treat the more than 10 million illegal immigrants who live in the [United States](#).

A recent [Washington Post](#) poll found that 81 percent of people said the government was "not doing enough" to stop illegal immigration. But 62 percent said those already in the country should be offered a chance to keep their jobs and apply for legal immigration status, while 35 percent said they should be deported.

Most legislative proposals call for some path toward legalization for those in the country illegally.

Organizers of today's demonstration say they plan to focus on three issues: improving border security, opposing amnesty for immigrants living illegally in the country and enforcing U.S. laws, including those against hiring illegal immigrants.

In the Washington region, activists said, many residents have strong negative opinions about illegal immigration but are fearful of being labeled anti-Latino if they speak out. The activists also said people tend to become more energized by problems in their communities, such as loitering laborers or crowded housing, than by national policy debates.

"People don't want to be vilified or called racists. They will send an anonymous e-mail but not go to meetings," said George Taplin, who heads the [Virginia](#) chapter of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, an [Arizona](#)-based group that has led efforts to seal the U.S.-[Mexico](#) border. Taplin said some local activists may go to the rally, but only if they belong to national groups.

Greg Letiecq, an activist from [Manassas](#), said that the rally was "a wonderful idea" but that it would be difficult to

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persuade a sizable group of residents to take part, even though many are concerned about local problems associated with illegal immigrants, especially crowded housing.

"People send me e-mails saying we need to do something, but they don't have the time, the vision or the background to pull it off," he said.

There is clearly a strong undercurrent of anger against illegal immigrants among area residents. In Herndon, plans to open a job site for immigrant day laborers last year led to a protracted fight that bitterly divided the town and drew national media attention. A similar proposal in Gaithersburg also aroused local opposition, although the center opened last week without incident.

Reports in The Post about the problems of illegal immigrants regularly elicit floods of angry e-mails and online messages, often anonymous.

Some of the worries are specific, such as complaints that immigrants overburden schools and hospitals or bring gang violence. Others are vague and emotional. They include fears of being inundated by foreigners, indignation at expensive accommodations made to newcomers who do not speak English and concern that the quality of community life is deteriorating. The complaints often express frustration with the government, which is seen as having done little to address the overall problem.

Here is a sampling of recent messages:

"I don't feel sorry for illegal aliens who broke our laws crossing our borders."

"When you get people who don't respect the law, you have a country that doesn't respect the law."

"I am so tired of watching Latinos in my neighborhood . . . leaving their empty Corona bottles all over the yard."

"Why are all of these people still speaking only Spanish after so many years?"

"The emergency rooms in my town are packed. . . . all our money is going to these illegals. . . . I am simply out of sympathy."

"They [are] taking our jobs."

"If they are criminals they deserve no help."

"Wait in line like my grandparents did."

"Do something to fix your problems at home rather than just running away and becoming another country's problem."

"If we do not defend ourselves there will be no USA at all worth having."

"Deport them all."

Many speakers scheduled to address the rally represent national or regional advocacy groups that draw on common sources of funding and have overlapping boards or staffs.

In many cases, the common denominator is John Tanton, a [Michigan](#) ophthalmologist who founded the influential lobbying group Federation for American Immigration Reform about three decades ago.

Of 15 speakers, at least seven have links to either FAIR or Tanton's private foundation, U.S. Inc. K.C. McAlpin is

executive director of ProEnglish, a wholly owned project of U.S. Inc. Radio host Terry Anderson has received thousands of dollars in funding from U.S. Inc. and is a founder of a group of African Americans opposed to illegal immigration that FAIR helped create. Col. Al Rodriguez is chairman of a group that FAIR co-organized for Latinos opposed to illegal immigration.

One speaker, Roger Hedgecock, has achieved a national following. He is a conservative radio host in [San Diego](#) whose show has long been a lightning rod for sentiment against illegal immigrants. Hedgecock's aides said the organizers hope to bring more than 1,000 supporters from [California](#) and other states, who will spend the week visiting members of Congress and holding other events.

In contrast to this scripted plan, a year ago, several million mostly Latino immigrants unexpectedly poured into the streets of [Los Angeles](#), [Dallas](#), [Chicago](#) and other cities to protest immigration legislation in Congress. The largely spontaneous burst of activism astonished the nation and appeared to signal a political coming of age for the country's large Latino population.

There is no indication that pro-immigrant or Latino groups will be out in force today, but a group calling itself D.C. Students for a Democratic Society has called for a noisy counter-demonstration. It has circulated unsigned fliers titled "Nobody is Illegal!" that ask supporters to bring noisemakers and signs.

One reason for the pent-up frustration over illegal immigration is that Congress has failed to produce immigration reform for the past several years, although some activists argue that no new law is needed. Last year's proposals collapsed in partisan fighting, and the divide is even more poisonous this year, with predictions that no final bill will emerge.

At the state level, proposals aimed at denying benefits to illegal immigrants have been defeated in the Virginia and [Maryland](#) legislatures in the past several years. Activists blame business interests that employ illegal immigrants for the defeats, but others said the growing influence of Latino and immigrant-rights groups has played a role.

Taplin said the high-profile controversy over the Herndon day-labor site had begun to galvanize longtime residents in other area communities. He said his organization is now working with groups in Manassas, Culpeper and [Harrisonburg](#) in Virginia, where large numbers of illegal immigrants work in farming, poultry plants and the service sector.

"Herndon has given people more courage," he said. "We are trying to get the grass roots going, and we have thousands of supporters. For most people, it's only a matter of keeping your head down until you're sure it's okay to put it up."

Staff writer Krissah Williams contributed to this report.

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