

## **Rally pushes end of aid to illegals; Proposal to be hot issue for lawmakers**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

October 18, 2005 Tuesday, Home Edition

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
ajc.com

**Section:** METRO NEWS; Pg. 1B

**Length:** 756 words

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### **Body**

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Opponents of illegal immigration **rallied** at the state Capitol on Monday, stepping up their **push** for legislation to deny state benefits to illegal immigrants and urging Gov. Sonny Perdue to get involved.

"If legal Georgia residents are not first in line for taxpayer services, then who is?" state Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) asked a crowd of a couple of hundred outside the Capitol.

Republican leaders in the Senate recently promised to make illegal immigration a top priority when **lawmakers** convene in January, and the subject is shaping up to be one of the **hot issues** of the 2006 General Assembly. Rogers is sponsoring legislation that would make anyone who receives state taxpayer-funded benefits prove that he or she is a Georgia resident and a U.S. citizen or is in the United States legally.

Supporters say states have a right to keep their limited resources for their residents. Opponents say the **issue** needs to be resolved at the federal level and accuse the GOP of trying to exploit voter worries about jobs and tax dollars during an election year.

"No single bill on a state level is sufficient," state Sen. Sam Zamarripa (D-Atlanta) said in an interview. "I put it in the category of pandering."

Monday's **rally** was organized by Cobb County Republican Chairman Anthony-Scott Hobbs and broadcast live on WGKA radio at 920 AM.

Hobbs, who hosts a talk show on the station, said he is "tired of the left trying to frame this . . . as anti-immigration. It's not anti-immigration. It's anti-illegal immigration."

Some **rally** speakers and participants said that Perdue, a Republican, should speak out on the **issue**. "Sonny, pick a side. We have," one sign read.

Conservative author Phil Kent said Perdue had been "sad to say, . . . silent" on the "outrage" of some illegal immigrants receiving college tuition breaks in Georgia.

Perdue was on a trade mission to Japan and China on Monday. Spokeswoman Heather Hedrick said the governor plans to work with legislators on the **issue**.

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"Although illegal immigration is primarily a federal issue, we will take action at the state level to limit the drain on taxpayer-funded programs by illegal immigrants who do not contribute to the system," Hedrick said.

Debbie Ellis, a systems engineer from Marietta, spent her lunch hour at the rally because she said she believes illegal immigration is a problem "that needs to be addressed, not ignored."

"It is up to the states to remove the welcome mat for illegal aliens," said Ellis, who said she also favors penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants --- which some business-friendly Republicans might not support.

Rogers' bill would not apply to some services. School systems must accept all children, regardless of legal status, and federal law requires hospitals, in life-threatening emergencies, to provide treatment to illegal immigrants.

Under the measure, illegal immigrants would be barred from enrolling in the state's 34 public universities and colleges. Currently, state officials do not keep track of how many illegal students are in the University System of Georgia. Colleges ask potential students whether they are Georgia residents for the purpose of assigning in-state or out-of-state tuition fees.

Rogers told the crowd that illegal immigrants may be costing the state up to \$1 billion for everything from emergency room care and public schooling to incarceration and traffic congestion.

Zamarripa said Rogers has no way of accurately calculating the potential costs.

"He's just making stuff up, and all he's really serious about is playing on the dark side of human emotions," Zamarripa declared. He called Rogers' legislation "overly simplistic and extreme."

Dana Tofig, spokesman for the state Department of Education, said state officials, relying on a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, don't even ask a person's residency or visa status when a child is being enrolled. "So we have no way to know how much educating undocumented students has cost us," he said.

Secretary of State Cathy Cox and Lt. Gov. Mark Taylor, both Democrats planning to run for governor in 2006, declined to comment Monday on Rogers' legislation.

"Everyone agrees we should not promote illegal immigration," Taylor spokeswoman Kristi Huller said. "But we're not going to comment on the bill until the legislative process begins."

Morton Brilliant, spokesman for Cox's campaign, would say only that the illegal immigration problem needs to be solved at the federal level. "The federal government needs to get real and start protecting our borders," he said.

## Graphic

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Photo: CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / StaffAt Monday's rally, Cobb County Republican Frank Brent holds a blowup of the driver's license issued to Mohammed Atta, a ringleader of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Photo: CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / StaffState Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) speaks Monday at the Capitol to backers of a bill to limit state services to illegal immigrants.

Graphic: A LOOK AT THE BILLSenate Bill 170, which was filed during the last legislative session but not acted on, is expected to be debated when the General Assembly convenes in January. The bill: \* Requires that anyone seeking taxpayer services, which require Georgia residency, must prove Georgia residency. Many agencies already require this. \* Establishes that someone who is not legally residing in the United States cannot be considered a legal resident of Georgia. \* Requires that Georgia agencies notify the U.S. Department of Homeland Security if a person who is subject to verification requirements fails to prove he or she is lawfully in the United States.

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## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspapers

**Subject:** US REPUBLICAN PARTY (90%); LEGISLATION (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); TAXES & TAXATION (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); EDUCATION SYSTEMS & INSTITUTIONS (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); GOVERNORS (78%); INTERVIEWS (77%); POLITICAL PARTIES (76%); TUITION FEES (74%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (74%); WORK BREAKS (66%)

**Organization:** US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (59%)

**Industry:** EDUCATION SYSTEMS & INSTITUTIONS (78%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (74%)

**Person:** SONNY PERDUE (79%)

**Geographic:** ATLANTA, GA, USA (79%); GEORGIA, USA (93%); JAPAN (79%); CHINA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** October 18, 2005

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