

Anti-Immigration Forces Focus on Herndon; Council Votes Tuesday on Whether to Fund Gathering Site for Day Laborers

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Body

As **Herndon** prepares to **vote Tuesday on whether** to designate an official **gathering** spot for **day laborers**, what began as a neighborhood quandary is evoking passions far beyond the town's borders.

Mark Williams, a guest host on WMAL-AM, exhorted his audience last week to line up at **Tuesday's** Town **Council** meeting, "whether you're from **Herndon** or Timbuktu," to protest plans to use public money to create a new **gathering site** for the job seekers, many of them undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Council members "have absolutely no intention of following the law," Williams boomed on "The Michael Graham Show" on Monday, broadcasting 3,000 miles away from WFBK in Sacramento. "The issue you're trying to solve," he told listeners, "is the fact that the United States has borders, and its citizens demand that they be enforced."

That was not the kind of attention **Herndon** leaders and residents anticipated when they began debating how to use local zoning and nuisance laws to deal with growing anger at the large groups of often noisy and disruptive men who congregate in parking lots and on sidewalks seeking work every morning.

But as the town of 22,000 near Dulles International Airport decides whether to use public **funds** to set up an official **site**, **Herndon** has become the focal point in a larger national debate over U.S. immigration policy.

The 150 men who **gather** daily at a 7-Eleven are featured on the Web **sites** of national groups fighting illegal immigration, including a white supremacist **site** offering to help organize protests before the **vote**.

Members of Congress from Colorado and Iowa who advocate stricter border controls have sent aides to testify before the local Planning Commission. Another WMAL host, Chris Core, has devoted 11 shows to the issue since July. Republican Jerry W. Kilgore's campaign for Virginia governor hit the front page last week when he pledged to oppose all publicly **funded** worker halls such as the one proposed in **Herndon**.

And Lou Dobbs, the CNN anchor who often denounces undocumented workers on his nightly show, last week featured a state delegate from Prince William County weighing in on an informal **day-laborer site** in Woodbridge.

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"My aide calls out to me, 'Hey boss, Lou Dobbs wants to talk to you about illegal aliens,' " Del. L. Scott Lingamfelter (R) said, recalling with wonder the interest from national television. "This day-laborer thing is symptomatic of a larger problem: Our borders are not secure."

Day laborers are causing tension in communities across the country, the most visible sign of the influx of immigrants pouring across U.S. borders, encouraged by what many perceive as a neglectful federal policy. In Herndon, which has the Washington region's highest concentration of foreign-born residents, pressure from frustrated homeowners catapulted tensions with workers into the news. Media reports then caught the eye of lawmakers and public policymakers.

The current furor stands in contrast to the relative calm in Montgomery and Arlington counties, where similar publicly funded sites have operated for several years.

The debate is "truly the culmination of everything that's been going on after 9/11," said Jose Vanegas, a Colombian immigrant who has worked with the day laborers. "The anti-immigrant sentiment has just been ratcheted up."

Herndon Mayor Michael L. O'Reilly supports the proposed hiring hall near the Loudoun County border -- and the \$170,000 from Fairfax County that would help fund it.

"If all everybody wants to talk about is national immigration policy, then they're in the wrong forum," O'Reilly said. "The issue our council is trying to address is too many people on a street corner looking for work."

Speakers at a Planning Commission hearing last month were told they could not testify about the day-laborer site if they brought up immigration policy.

"It's unfortunate that a fellow from Sacramento is so concerned about our community," said O'Reilly, referring to Williams's show.

Williams also appeared on the Fox cable channel's morning news show Wednesday to talk about Herndon. He has never been there, but last week he urged listeners opposed to day laborers to "melt the switchboard" at the town clerk's office. The phone system was overwhelmed with calls, and the town manager unplugged the phone lines for four days.

"For me to walk into Herndon, that was a piece of cake," said Williams, who frequently takes on the issue of illegal immigration in his home state.

Core, the WMAL host, called the town a "beachhead," however unwitting, on which opponents of illegal immigration can focus their frustration.

"Herndon is caught in a wave, whether they wanted to be or not," he said. "A pressure valve has been released."

Core said he plans to broadcast his 6 to 9 p.m. show Tuesday from Herndon.

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Anti-Immigration Forces Focus on Herndon; Council Votes Tuesday on Whether to Fund Gathering Site for Day Laborers

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