

In Manassas Park, Sanity; Taking a stand against illegal-immigrant bashing

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Body

THE LITTLE town of **Manassas Park** is an unassuming place -- not the sort of town you'd necessarily expect to **take** a courageous **stand** on illegal immigration. Yet that's exactly what it's done.

Built as a bedroom community of Cape Cods in the '50s, it remains primarily residential, so much so that it is only now getting around to building a city center, which officials hope will broaden the tax base. Although its population has nearly tripled in the last 20 years, to 13,500, it is one of the smallest incorporated cities in Virginia. As an enclave of mostly affordable housing in pricey Northern Virginia, **Manassas Park** has attracted many Hispanic immigrants, and as a result the city has become majority minority. Still, no Hispanic has yet run for mayor or the City Council, which is dominated by Republicans and conservative civil servants required by law to run as independents.

Manassas Park is bounded on all sides by Prince William County, which has lately joined the nationwide rush to hound **illegal immigrants** by denying them public services and siccing the police on them in hopes of driving them away. Prince William's neighbor to the north, Loudoun County, has done the same. But **Manassas Park**, its diminutive size notwithstanding, is refusing to be bullied into joining in the immigrant-**bashing**.

Instead, the City Council has **taken** a stance opposing the nativist fever all around. The mayor, Frank Jones, and council members rejected what they characterized as vigilante actions **against illegal immigrants**. The danger, several said, was that all Hispanics would be tarred with the brush of intolerance and that the line between stalking **illegal immigrants** and whipping up a general hatred **against** Hispanics would blur. In a community where longtime residents know most of their Hispanic neighbors as good citizens, there was little sentiment for a xenophobic crusade.

Elected officials in **Manassas Park** say that they oppose illegal immigration but that stopping it is a federal responsibility. Cities and counties lack the means to do so, the officials say. Instead, they are doing what localities should be doing -- getting tough on problems often associated with **illegal immigrants**, such as crowded flophouses, excessive numbers of cars **parked** at residences and gangs. Mr. Jones says he is also seeking greater authority from the state to register and inspect rental properties systematically to ensure that decent standards of health and safety are maintained. Until Congress gets serious about enacting a realistic national policy on immigration, **Manassas Park**'s example is a sane, sensible approach to dealing with the problem at a local level.

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