

Immigration-rights groups hammer Ford on past votes

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Body

WHEN HAROLD **Ford** addresses black and Latino lawmakers at an Albany gala tonight, he'll use the platform to talk up his ideas on job creation and tax cuts.

But before **Ford** even got near the podium, his invitation to address the Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators drew protests from immigrant-rights advocates upset by his **voting** record as a Tennessee congressman.

A year ago, it was Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand - the woman **Ford** may challenge in a Democratic primary - who had to convince immigrant-rights activists she could be trusted.

Now it's **Ford's** turn.

In Congress, **Ford voted** in favor of the Sensenbrenner bill, which would have allowed local police to arrest illegal immigrants and made it a crime for nurses, priests and others to help them.

Ford's positions on immigration issues are "inconsistent at best [and] deeply troubling at worst," Chung-Wha Hong, director of the the New York Immigration Coalition, wrote to the lawmakers' association this month.

Separately, black, Latino and Asian City Council members called **Ford's** selection as keynote speaker "deeply disappointing."

Ford's camp defends his record: Aides point to his **votes** for measures helping immigrants who seek health care, do skilled work and serve in the military.

He has also said he now sides with Mayor Bloomberg and does not back having local law enforcement go after illegal immigrants.

"Harold has a strong and distinguished pro-immigration record, which is why anti-immigration **groups** have consistently opposed him," said spokeswoman Tammy Sun.

Gillibrand faced similar scrutiny when she was first appointed to the seat by Gov. Paterson: One Latino official even said her House **voting** record on immigration bordered "on xenophobia."

Seeking to soften her stance, Gillibrand last February told the Immigration Coalition she'd support a moratorium on raids until Congress approved comprehensive reforms and make other changes to her views.

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Hong said her **group** is pleased with Gillibrand's "pro-immigrant positions [on] legalization and citizenship" and her shift away from her earlier, more "hard-line" stances.

As for **Ford**, Hong said she's happy if he is "distancing himself from his **past** positions he has taken, but he has a lot of explaining to do. . . . You can't just say, '[I] just changed my mind.'"

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