

Bush aide delivers immigration pitch; U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL'S SPEECH DRAWS PROTESTERS FROM LEFT AND RIGHT

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Body

U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales came to the South Bay on Friday to make a case for the **Bush** administration's plan for **immigration** reform, but was met with protest and resistance from supporters and opponents of the plan's most controversial provision: a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

"Reform must be based on reality. We can't deport 12 million people," Gonzales said, speaking before a crowd of 150 at the Marriott Hotel in Santa Clara, during a public forum sponsored by the Commonwealth Club.

Outside, about 20 members of the Raging Grannies and anti-war **protesters**, held up signs that declared, "No War on Immigrants, Iraq, Iran." An hour after the address, a couple of members of the group chanted in the hotel lobby as the crowd **left** the room, "Immigrants Have Human **Rights**/Grannies join in the fight."

In a hotel meeting room nearby, two officials from the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, a civilian border patrol group based in Arizona, called a news conference to denounce the **Bush** proposal. A sign on the wall: "Border Security First. No Amnesty."

Gonzales repeated the arguments he's made for several months in **speeches** and news conferences across the country to drum up support for **immigration** reform proposals being touted by President **Bush**.

"Reform that's anything short of comprehensive will not be nearly good enough," he said. "This is a very delicate and very complicated issue."

The **Bush** plan calls for increased border security, a temporary guest-worker program, an employee verification system and legalization for some undocumented immigrants already living and working in the United States, after they've paid taxes and penalties and committed to learning English.

But like the conflicting House of Representatives and **U.S.** Senate bills, Gonzales acknowledged, there is no public consensus on **immigration** reform, as mirrored in protests and denouncements at Friday's forum.

The **Bush** proposal for a temporary guest-worker program "is a way of exploiting workers. It won't lead to citizenship," said Ruth Robertson of the Raging Grannies. Robertson supports legalization and a path to citizenship.

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Immigrant advocates across the country have criticized the **Bush** plan as not going far enough with legalization. And officials with the Minuteman, which opposes any form of legalization, slammed it as "unacceptable."

"As this nation's highest-ranking law enforcement officer," said Al Garza, executive director of the Minuteman, "it is inexcusable that **Attorney General** Alberto Gonzales would promote a blanket amnesty for people who have committed such felonies as document fraud, identity theft and income tax evasion."

In his address, Gonzales said, "illegal **immigration** degrades the rule of law," but an earned legalization program is fair.

Asked during a question-and-answer session with the audience his opinion of the Minuteman, Gonzales said: "We live in a free society. But as a **general** matter, law enforcement should be in the hands of law enforcement agencies."

"I understand the frustrations," he said. "The bottom line is, we need to do a better job on the border."

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