

Herndon Stands Up. But for What?

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Body

On May 2, voters in **Herndon** ousted the mayor and council members who had supported the creation of a day-laborer center for the town's immigrant workers. Was this a measure of public opinion on illegal immigration? Here's **what** the advocates on both sides say:

History has a penchant for using small towns as a stage for large events. Think of Gettysburg and Selma. Almost two weeks ago, the history-making town was **Herndon**, where voters fired their mayor and like-minded members of the **Herndon** Town Council in **what** can be seen as the first true metric in the national debate on illegal immigration.

Herndon is an American microcosm: 26 percent Hispanic, 10 percent black, 37 percent foreign-born. Once reliably conservative, these days it trends liberal and votes Democratic. **Herndon**'s deposed political leaders were deaf to the widespread opposition among town residents to a taxpayer-funded day-laborer site that was created last August.

Those of us who thought that facilitating illegal activities was wrong were painted as racist, hate-mongering xenophobes. Nearly all the local newspapers, including The Post, supported the incumbents or their policies and painted opponents as anti-immigrant, rather than anti-"illegal" immigrant. Those who profit from the exploitation of illegal immigrant labor endorsed and funded the mayor and his allies.

Herndon holds a clear warning for Washington and both major political parties: Stop ignoring the will of the people about illegal immigration, or you will be checking in at your own day-laborer site -- on K Street, no doubt.

On May 1 thousands of uninvited illegal immigrants took to the streets with signs and slogans. But history will recall that on the next day, tiny **Herndon** gave heed to the words that they chanted: "¡Sí, se puede!" Yes, it can be done.

And it was -- in **Herndon**.

Who's next?

-- William Campenni

is a member of the **Herndon** Minutemen.

williamcampenni@verizon.net

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Project Hope and Harmony led the effort to create a site at which day laborers could congregate in Herndon. We felt it was a moral imperative to help those who badly needed help and to solve a community problem with the help of members of that community. Sadly, opponents of the site say that it serves illegal immigrants, and they found eager allies for that viewpoint among anti-immigration groups and self-righteous journalists.

The site has done its intended job; it has ended the chaos on the street corners where laborers assembled in the heat, cold or rain in the hope of getting a job. Often, the day laborers were exploited. But apparently it doesn't matter how well the site works, how much it would cost to expel workers that our economy needs or how inhumane it would be to close the site: Critics still want the day laborer site shut down.

Some say the public has spoken through the recent election. Some say the laborers would be better served by returning home and perhaps trying to come back as legal immigrants. Some say they don't want the "illegals" to be put on a path to legalization. But the more I hear these opinions, the more I see them for what they really are: bigotry.

I once saw a bumper sticker that read, "Hate is not a family value." Apparently, in Herndon, it is about to become one unless the decent silent majority reclaims the community.

-- Mukit Hossain

is founder of Project Hope and Harmony.

mhossain@continewtech.com

Should we reward illegal behavior with hard-earned dollars from law-abiding citizens? The voters in the recent Herndon election answered the question with a resounding "No." By ousting the mayor and council members who supported using taxpayer dollars to build a day-laborer center for illegal immigrants to congregate and find jobs, Herndon voters chose instead to elect officials who would follow the law.

Legal immigration made this country what it is today. We honor legal immigrants when we ensure that our laws are followed. I don't believe it is too much to ask that individuals obey the laws of our society before they take advantage of what our society has to offer. To reward illegal behavior is to further encourage that behavior and to demean those who have followed the rules to come to America legally.

The former elected officials in Herndon sought not to honor legal immigration but to encourage even more illegal immigration. As it began to become an issue during last year's governor's race, Herndon officials simply blamed the illegal immigration issue on the federal government. I agree that our federal government must give us real and meaningful immigration reform legislation that will be enforced at all levels of government. Until then, locally elected officials should not encourage the blatant violation of our laws.

Our nation was founded on the rule of law. Allowing one group to violate those laws with encouragement from locally elected officials strikes a blow to our legal system. Do we allow individuals to obey only those laws they feel like obeying? The voters in Herndon thought not.

-- Jerry Kilgore

was the Republican candidate for Virginia

governor in the 2005 election.

jkilgore@williamsmullen.com

On May 2 Herndon citizens elected a new mayor and Town Council in a contest characterized by some as a referendum on U.S. immigration policy.

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Herndon is a small town in Fairfax County, and immigration issues are not the town's to solve. The agency that does have that mandate -- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services -- has told **Herndon** that it does not have the manpower to enforce immigration laws in the town. Yet the town badly needed a solution to the problem of men gathering on street corners to seek day work. That is why the Town Council approved a permit for the management of a temporary, regulated site for day workers. The Supreme Court has ruled that anti-loitering ordinances in the absence of criminal activity are not enforceable. It also is clear that an anti-solicitation ordinance without the existence of a regulated site would have violated federal law.

The regulated worker center does not violate federal, state or local laws. Rather, it is adherence to such laws that made the center the most workable solution for the town. Having such a site also allowed **Herndon** to establish an anti-solicitation ordinance, which it enacted in September.

Since the center opened, day workers have almost disappeared from Elden Street, a former problem area. The site also provides an orderly process for the assembly and employment of day workers. **Herndon**'s incoming mayor and council members won election based on promises to close the regulated site. They were elected by a narrow majority with the help and the financial support of outside interest groups. I wish them and **Herndon** well.

-- Michael L. O'Reilly

is mayor of **Herndon**; he was defeated in
the election.

mike.oreilly@herndon-va.gov

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