

Thousands Attend Immigration Rallies

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Hundreds of **thousands** of pro-**immigration** demonstrators mobilized on the Mall and in scores of cities across the country Monday in a powerful display of grass-roots muscle-flexing that organizers said could mark a coming-of-age for Latino political power in the United States.

Calling for legal protection for illegal immigrants, the demonstrators -- the overwhelming majority of them Hispanic -- streamed past the White House in Washington, jammed streets near City Hall in Lower Manhattan, marched in Atlanta, held a small candlelight vigil in Los Angeles and, in Mississippi, sang the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" in Spanish.

Demonstrators massed in cities large and small. The mostly peaceful demonstrations drew only a smattering of anti-**immigration** protesters.

The **rallies** came against the backdrop of fierce political struggle in Washington. The House has passed legislation to tighten border security and criminalize illegal immigrants and those who assist them. The Senate is stalemated over a compromise that would provide a path to legal status for the 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States. President Bush has backed the Senate approach but has declined to pressure Republicans to act on it.

A new Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that three-quarters of Americans think the government is not doing enough to prevent illegal **immigration**. But three in five said they favor providing illegal immigrants who have lived here for years a way to gain legal status and eventual citizenship. One in five Americans embraced the House bill, which includes no guest-worker program and would make felons out of those in this country illegally.

-- Dan Balz and Darryl Fears

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