

HISPANICS AIM CAMPAIGN AT ANTI-IMMIGRATION ADVOCATES

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Body

Hispanic activists in San Jose and across California on Saturday launched a major **campaign** to combat anti-immigrant sentiment, get more **Hispanics** registered to vote and defeat a ballot measure intended to prevent illegal residents from using schools or other public services.

About 70 **Hispanics** gave impassioned speeches and discussed strategies in the gymnasium at San Jose's Peter Burnett Academy, which was adorned with Spanish-language signs that declared, "Down with Pete Wilson" and "I also contribute to this society -- I pay taxes."

Elsewhere, about 2,000 demonstrators carrying banners and chanting slogans marched on Los Angeles City Hall on Saturday to support immigrant rights. Similar events were held in Fresno, Sacramento, San Diego and Santa Maria, said organizers with the California Latino Civil Rights Network. The group was formed in February to counter what its literature terms "anti-immigrant hysteria and intolerance."

Many who attended the San Jose session were especially bitter that a number of politicians -- Republican and Democrat -- have made illegal immigration into what they said was a divisive and racist **campaign** issue.

"We all better get angry," said Maria Fuentes of the Santa Clara County group, United for Justice. "Immigration has touched all of us. It's a personal issue. We must work very hard and be very organized."

Among other things, Hispanic activists want to raise \$2 million to finance the Network's pro-immigrant efforts, push to get more foreign-born **Hispanics** naturalized and register 250,000 new Hispanic voters by this time next year.

Encouraged to vote

Noting that 3.7 million **Hispanics** in California are not naturalized or registered to vote, Network organizer Mario Salgado urged the Hispanic community in California to realize its full political potential.

"The sleeping giant has to wake up," he said. "We can really turn around California politics."

Of special concern to many **Hispanics** at the meeting was the so-called Save- Our-State initiative, which has been proposed for the November ballot. It would attempt to cut the number of illegal immigrants using schools, hospitals and other public agencies by requiring officials who run such programs to determine the legal status of everyone they serve.

Law sides with immigrants

Opponents of the measure say it's unconstitutional and note that the Supreme Court previously has ruled that all children, regardless of legal status, are entitled to an education. They also argue that the measure would place an extraordinary and costly burden on school and other public officials.

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Moreover, Martha Jimenez, an attorney with the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund, warned the San Jose group that many ***Hispanics***, including citizens and legal immigrants, would likely be more closely scrutinized because of the way they look.

If the ballot measure passes, "We're going to have to prove that we have a right to receive services that we receive today," she said. "I just want people to understand the dangerous nature of this initiative."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

To get in touch with the California Latino Civil Rights Network, contact Jorge Gonzalez at (408) 295-0656, Carmelita Gutierrez at (408) 924-2518, or the Hispanic Concilio of San Mateo County at (415) 589-2964.

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