

## **Lewis assails 'repugnant' immigrant laws**

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**Byline:** MARY LOU PICKEL

Staff

### **Body**

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U.S. Rep. John **Lewis** called Georgia **laws** that crack down on illegal **immigrants** "**repugnant**" after speaking at a civil rights hearing Thursday in Atlanta.

"They're violating due process and basic human rights of people," **Lewis** said outside the Georgia Railroad Freight Depot downtown.

**Lewis** (D-Ga.) addressed about 150 union workers and **immigrant**-rights advocates gathered to hear claims that federal immigration agents violated rights during raids.

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union organized the Commission on ICE Misconduct and Violations of 4th Amendment Rights, a commission of labor leaders, politicians, academics, and civil rights advocates, to investigate claims that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have conducted unreasonable searches and seizures nationwide. The commission has held hearings in Washington, Boston and Des Moines, Iowa.

"The **laws** that have been passed in Georgia are **repugnant** and an insult to human dignity," **Lewis** said. "They're from another era."

**Lewis** thanked those present for their advocacy for **immigrants'** rights and told them not to be afraid to "get in the way. Sometimes there comes a time when people must get in the way and get in trouble --- in good trouble," **Lewis** said to applause. "Don't give up. Don't give in. We're going to change things," he said.

ICE agents have stepped up raids as the debate surrounding immigration reform has intensified nationwide. The government says it must not turn a blind eye to those working in the country illegally. Few employers have been arrested.

Protesters outside Thursday's hearings waved placards and yelled at **Lewis**, saying he has "sold out" American workers. They say illegal **immigrants** accept lower wages and poor working conditions.

In Georgia, ICE agents raided the Crider poultry plant in Stillmore and arrested about 125 workers in September 2006.

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In Chattanooga, 100 workers were arrested in April 2008 during a multi-state raid of Pilgrim's Pride poultry plants.

And on May 12, ICE raided a Postville, Iowa, meat plant, detaining about 390 workers. About 270 were sentenced to jail for using false documents. In past raids, illegal workers had usually been charged only with civil immigration violations and deported.

Atlanta advocates said Cobb County's deportation of illegal immigrants from its jail encourages racial profiling during traffic stops. They also testified that immigration raids on meat and poultry plants leave young children unattended when their parents are arrested.

While most witnesses were lawyers or advocates, one teenager described her face-to-face confrontation with ICE agents.

Justeen Mancha, 17, of Reidsville recalled the September morning when ICE agents entered her mobile home looking for illegal immigrants who worked at the nearby Crider plant.

Her mother, a U.S. citizen, had worked there previously.

Mancha said she was surprised to see the ICE agents, including one with his hand on a holstered gun. "My heart just about bust out of my chest," Mancha said.

"It's so sad and it hurts a lot to be targeted because we are Mexican," Mancha said. "I thought maybe I should hang around a lot of white people so they wouldn't think I was illegal," she said.

Mancha grew up in Reidsville and in her spare time participates in agricultural clubs and likes to "show hogs."

Mancha's mother, Maria Christina Martinez, 35, said agents entered her home without a warrant. She filed a civil rights lawsuit against the federal government through the Southern Poverty Law Center.

ICE spokesman Richard Rocha said he could not comment on the specifics of Mancha's case because it is in litigation.

"ICE agents and officers follow agency policies during all operations," Rocha wrote in an e-mail.

"These operations are conducted so as to minimize the risk to officers, the people they arrest and others who are in the vicinity. ICE will continue to vigorously enforce immigration laws in order to maintain the integrity of our nation's legal immigration system."

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