

Immigrants will call on Congress Several caravans are heading for nation's capital to press for immigration reform bill

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Body

As President George W. Bush **presses** lawmakers to get **immigration reform** back on track, **immigrants** across the country are marching, praying, writing lawmakers and hitting the road for Washington in a desperate push to revive the stalled measure.

Before the **bill** collapsed in the Senate last week, most **immigrants** agreed that it was flawed. But seeing a rare opportunity for change slipping away - and recognizing it may not come again for years - many insisted they wouldn't let it go without a fight.

The **immigrants'** rallying cry echoed the president's words Tuesday to divided Republicans: "The status quo is unacceptable."

"There was a lot of frustration that politics got in the way of sound, necessary public policy," said Jerry Gonzalez of the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, a statewide organization whose 4,000 members are **calling** their senators seeking **reforms**. "The time is now. They need to act. They have to."

A **caravan** left Los Angeles for Washington on Sunday, picking up **immigrants** along the way who are eager to tell their stories to legislators.

A second **caravan** left Wednesday after a send-off from Roman Catholic Cardinal Roger Mahoney.

The first group was led by Eduardo "Piolin" Sotelo, host of the nationally syndicated radio show "Piolin por la Manana," and was cheered on by hundreds of supporters as it left a historic plaza from the city's Mexican past.

Sotelo is collecting letters asking for a path to citizenship for the country's approximately 12 million illegal **immigrants**. He's broadcasting his appeal from cities along the way and expects to have about 1 million letters by the time he gets to Washington today.

"If someone's already proved they're working hard for this great nation and for his family, and he's proved he's a good human being, why not live legally here in this country?" Sotelo said. "We're waiting for a positive answer from our senators."

Immigrants whose families were separated during **immigration** raids are hanging all their hopes on the possibility of comprehensive **reform**.

Tony Wasilewski, a Polish **immigrant** living on the outskirts of Chicago, saw his wife deported to Poland on June 8. She took with her the couple's 6-year-old American-born son fearing he was too young to be away from her.

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"I want to bring my family back to America, and I want to protect families that are in the process of deportation," he said. "I'm going there to try to talk to our leaders, our congressmen, our senators. We need a change."

Wasilewski is also joining a caravan of about 100 immigrants, clergy members and other supporters on a 10-city tour that culminates with a rally next week in Washington.

On Sunday, Catholic dioceses around the country took part in a day of prayer for immigration reform. Bishop Oscar Solis celebrated Mass at Our Lady Queen of Angels Church in downtown Los Angeles, drawing 250 worshippers.

In Atlanta, immigrant groups are calling for an interfaith day of prayer on June 21.

Notes

Nation

Graphic

PHOTO

PHOTO - Supporters gather to bid goodbye to friends and relatives leaving on "The Dreams Across America Tour" at Union Station in Los Angeles on Wednesday. Organized by the Catholic Church, unions and community groups, the group includes several dozen legal immigrants who will cross the country by train while making stops to tell their stories of coming to the United States. Photo by Nick Ut | The Associated Press PHOTO - Catholic Cardinal Roger Mahoney of Los Angeles prays before the departure of "The Dreams Across America Tour." The trip is scheduled to finish in Washington next week. Photo by Nick Ut | The Associated Press

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