

## **Local Officials Seek Help From U.S. on Immigration**

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### **Body**

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Gather 100 **local officials** from 30 states -- Democrats and Republicans from big states and little ones -- and there are probably few issues on which all will agree. But President Bush's record on illegal **immigration** apparently is one.

"It is a failure," said Mark D. Boughton, speaking on Monday at a gathering of those **officials** here. Mr. Boughton, the mayor of Danbury, Conn., created a stir last year when he **sought**, unsuccessfully, to have State Police troopers deputized as **immigration** control agents.

"A terrible hardship for my taxpayers," said Gloria D. Whisenhunt, chairwoman of the Forsyth County board of commissioners, in Winston-Salem, N.C. The schools there are crammed with the children of illegal immigrants, she said.

"Enough is enough," said Steve Levy, the Suffolk County executive and co-organizer of the event. Mr. Levy became a sort of guiding light among **local officials** around the country after he decided last summer to **help** shut down boarding houses in Farmingville, N.Y., where hundreds of illegal immigrants lived in crowded conditions.

"The federal government has to adopt a sane **immigration** policy," Mr. Levy said.

The gathering, organized and convened here under the banner of the Coalition of Mayors and County Executives for **Immigration** Reform, called for border security and, most urgently, reimbursement to localities for the cost of dealing with a problem its members say the federal government has ignored.

"In recent polls, 88 percent of the people said that illegal **immigration** is a serious or 'somewhat serious' problem," Mr. Levy said. "Yet there just seems to be a disconnect between that and what the Congress and the media think."

In the contentious national debate over what is called **immigration** reform, there are a half-dozen factions at odds, factions representing the interests of business, of labor, of immigrant advocates and opponents, of Republican presidential hopefuls and Democratic partisans.

For good measure, because most illegal immigrants are Hispanic, the issue is loaded with racial and ethnic overtones, a reality that Mr. Levy had to face last summer when immigrant advocates in Suffolk County labeled his boarding house sweeps as racist.

"But this group has nothing to do with racism or bigotry," said Robert Vasquez, a county commissioner from Canyon County, Idaho. "We are here because we are elected **United States officials**, and it's our duty to uphold the laws."

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Major bills under review in the House and Senate promote an array of conflicting responses to the question of how to define the issue, and how to deal with the reality of 11 million illegal aliens in the **United States**. Among the suggested solutions are amnesty, deportation, temporary worker status, permanent guest work status and an impermeable wall at the Mexican border.

But Monday's assembly of **local officials** introduced a new faction into the fray. This one, its members say, is composed of **officials** who must deal every day with the realities of illegal **immigration** as they intersect with taxpayers.

The **officials** raised many questions for the federal government. Who pays for the shuttering of boarding houses like those in Farmingville? Who pays for the extra classroom space, the unreimbursed cost of medical care, the cost of police and fire protection for the additional human lives? Where will they be housed?

The White House did not ignore the meeting, but at the last minute downgraded the rank of its representative. In place of Ruben Barrales, a deputy assistant to the president and White House director of intergovernmental affairs, who was originally scheduled to attend, the White House sent a liaison to city **officials**, Toby Burke.

Mr. Burke, who listened respectfully, at one point said the president was **seeking** "a comprehensive, not a piecemeal, solution" to the problem of illegal **immigration**. He said the president's proposal to create guest worker status for some or all illegal aliens would not constitute an amnesty.

Then, while the **officials** vented for two hours with what seemed like the relief of troubled individuals finding their first support group, Mr. Burke said little else.

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**Industry:** ROOMING & BOARDING HOUSES (72%)

**Person:** Paul Vitello; George W (Pres) Bush

Local Officials Seek Help From U.S. on Immigration

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