

Immigration bill foes protest; Activists rally outside Chambliss' office

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Body

The placards reading "Secure Our Borders" and "Stop the Guest Worker Amnesty" may have been pointed at motorists Thursday.

But the midday protest outside the Galleria Office Park in Cobb County was designed to grab attention 13 floors above, in the office of Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.).

"That turnout sold us down the Rio Grande," east Cobb resident Maria Litland said, waving an American flag in the direction of the curved glass office building.

Organized by anti-illegal immigration activist D.A. King, the protest was designed to turn up the heat on Chambliss and fellow Georgia Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson. They are among the Senate leaders backing a controversial immigration reform compromise with President Bush.

The bipartisan measure has absorbed a barrage of criticism from the left and the right since being unveiled last month. Hardliners say it's too soft on border security and the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the country. Immigrant advocates say it would break up immigrant families and give illegal immigrants incentive to remain in the shadows.

Chambliss and Isakson have acknowledged the plan isn't perfect, but say it's far better than the status quo. They insist the measure would require that the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border be secured before other reforms, such as the creation of a temporary worker program, could be put in place.

Melanie Williams of Duluth was among the roughly 60 protesters who say that's not good enough.

No matter how it's dressed up, the Senate compromise would send a clear message to other people considering illegal entry into the United States, said Williams, who held a banner that declared "We are America --- Attrition Through Enforcement." "People will sneak in and think 'Oh, I'll just wait for the next amnesty,'" she said.

A few counter-protesters gathered across the street with "Welcome, We Are All Immigrants" signs. Mableton resident Rich Pellegrino, who organized the group, said considering the lack of immigration enforcement over two

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decades, it's disingenuous to suddenly expel the people who build houses and pluck chickens in Georgia. Pellegrino said he's gained new respect for the Georgia senators.

"When a politician takes a stand that's not popular with his constituency, that is a statesman, not just a politician," he said.

But most of those standing at Akers Mill Road and Galleria Drive had soured on the senators. They held signs such as "No More Anchor Babies" and "Illegal aliens displace U.S. workers."

"If they vote 'yes,' " said Georgia Minutemen organizer Todd Walker, "it's political suicide."

Chambliss released a statement saying he and Isakson are working to secure the border first, prohibit a new pathway to citizenship and end illegal **immigration**.

"If the final **bill** does not meet our key criteria we will not support it," **Chambliss** said. DeKalb County CEO Vernon Jones, who plans to run against **Chambliss**, shook hands with the demonstrators and said he wanted to hear their concerns. Pressed on what he'd do differently by several dubious protesters, Jones said he'd insist on the enforcement of existing **immigration** laws.

King, the **protest** organizer and president of the Marietta-based Dustin Inman Society, accompanied about 30 other demonstrators to **Chambliss' office**. The senator was not there, but they met with one of **Chambliss**' field representatives.

Many wore bumper stickers on their backs. They read "Kick Me! I am a Citizen."

Graphic

Photo: ANDY SHARP / StaffDeKalb County CEO Vernon Jones (left) chats with D.A. King, who organized the **protest** against the **immigration bill** supported by U.S. Sens. Saxby **Chambliss** --- whom Jones plans to run against in the next election --- and Johnny Isakson./ImageData* ImageData*

Photo: ANDY SHARP / StaffJohn Litland was among about 100 protesters at the anti-**immigration bill** **rally**./ImageData*

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