

Legislature 2008: Hispanic leaders invoke MLK tactics

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Body

A state legislator challenged **Hispanic leaders** Wednesday to act with restraint in the aftermath of Georgia's crackdown on illegal immigration.

Hispanic caucus members had an opportunity for self-reflection at their meeting --- it's the first time in two years no major immigration bills are expected.

Rep. Tony Sellier (R-Fort Valley) **invoked** the philosophy of civil rights **leader** the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as an example of how to move forward. "Back in the time of Martin Luther King, there was a movement for peaceful change, and that's what we need to do," Sellier told a group of about 60 **leaders** gathered at the Capitol. "Let's not call each other names," Sellier said.

He also urged assimilation of immigrants. "One of the biggest lessons I've learned is assimilation," Sellier said, after making opening remarks in Spanish.

Hispanic leaders were caught in a contentious debate with legislators and anti-illegal immigration activists two years ago. That's when the state **Legislature** passed one of the toughest crackdowns on illegal immigration in the country. Congress debated national immigration reform at the same time, and immigrants organized protests nationwide, including Atlanta. Last year, the new law went into effect.

This year all seems quiet.

That is good news for Sara Gonzalez, outgoing head of the Georgia **Hispanic** Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber organized the caucus breakfast of bacon, eggs and biscuits.

"I certainly hope from the bottom of my heart that this year it won't be as contentious as last year," Gonzalez told the group. "Georgia has been a tremendous challenge for Latinos, but I love challenges. We will continue to fight for our civil rights."

Top on the **Hispanic** caucus' list is more **Hispanic** appointments and more trade between Georgia and Latin America and Spain.

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Rep. David Casas (R-Lilburn), a high school teacher, said the key to prosperity is education. He argued in favor of school voucher programs and called for more technical education. "Not everyone is going to go to college," he said.

Gerald McDowell, development director for Gwinnett Village, agreed that King's philosophy could be a model for the **Hispanic** community.

"We're not having a conversation," McDowell said of the tone of the nation's immigration debate. "There's a lot of yelling going on. Consequently, there's a lot of misinterpretation."

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