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Many tell Rep. Bob Inglis immigration poses concern

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Illegal immigration, high gas prices, health care costs and government spending were some of the concerns voiced during a town meeting conducted by U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-4th, at the Hendricks branch library in Simpsonville.

About 75 people packed a small library meeting room July 5 to quiz Inglis on a variety of topics during the first stop in his "Walk Talks," a series of seven town hall meetings throughout the 4th District.

Immigration drew the most comments from audience members, many troubled by what they saw as a flood of illegal immigrants destabilizing the future of the United States.

For 50 minutes of the 90-minute session they peppered Inglis with questions about immigration, wanting to know why existing immigration laws were not being enforced, why employers were not being penalized for hiring illegal workers, why illegal residents were not being rounded up and shipped home, why local law enforcement agencies were not being encouraged to help solve illegal immigration, and why proposed law changes would allow illegal immigrants to return to the United States.

Advertisement Inglis said the existing immigration laws need changing.

"I think we need to change our immigration laws because the laws we've got are pretty much unenforceable, unless you want to live in a far greater police state," he said.

For example, he said the Upstate has six Immigration and Custom Enforcement agents to enforce laws in an area that by some estimates has up to 50,000 illegal immigrants.

The agents are overwhelmed, he said. But adding more agents would cost about \$100,000 apiece, taking into account salaries, office space, equipment and vehicles.


Inglis said the House passed HR 4437, The Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act, in December that would help ease the immigration problem by getting the private sector involved. The Senate has its own version of an immigration bill.

The House bill would require employers to immediately check if a prospective worker's Social Security number is valid. If the employer knowingly hires an illegal worker he would face harsh fines.

"We really need some help from the private sector to shut off the job magnet," Inglis said. "What we would like to do is have the private sector carry more of the burden."

He acknowledged that state and local law enforcement agencies are receiving little federal support when they arrest illegal workers, but that those agencies shouldn't be responsible for immigration enforcement.

"This is a federal government responsibility," he said.

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Inglis said the federal government needs to shut off the flow of illegal immigrants and increase the number of legal immigrants each year.

The U.S. allowed 362,000 people to immigrate legally in 2004, Inglis said. That's not enough, he said, and here's why.

Many graduate students come to the United States to be educated, for example at Clemson University.

"After we educate him or her, we really want them to stay here," he said. "We want them to become citizens because they are really bright and they can help us reinvent the car.

"We don't want that guy or that lady to come here and be sort of temporary worker. We want them to become full citizens, because America's concept is, you come here, you become one of us."

The U.S. should not become a temporary worker society, Inglis said, pointing to Kuwait which he said has 800,000 citizens who don't work and 2-3 million guest workers.

"That is not an American concept," Inglis said. "In America, everybody should work. Everybody should be a part of building this enterprise America."

Inglis also dismissed the idea of closing America's borders to immigrants, even those with no skills. One just needs to look at the past, he said.

"You know what? That is some of our parents and grandparents. They came from Ireland and all they knew was potatoes, and all they knew was how to dig them. And you know what, they won World War II and they built the most prosperous economy in the world.

"America is too young to die and we are too young to close ourselves out."

Next wee - Inglis: "\$3 a gallon will become a fond memory."
