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Article published Oct 14, 2005

Inglis gives his take on immigration at town hall

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Published: Friday, October 14, 2005

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INMAN -- Requiring employers to verify applicants' Social Security numbers would reduce the number of illegal aliens working American jobs, U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., said Thursday.

"This is something strange for a Republican to say," Inglis told a crowd of about 30 in Chapman High School's cafeteria.

He shuddered.

"What if we require you to call and check that number? If it doesn't match, you couldn't hire me. That would reduce the demand of coming to America illegally."

A little college professor, a little debate moderator -- for Inglis, the immigration equation is one of supply and demand.

He's in the middle of an "immigration tour" -- having already visited the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement office, and area emergency rooms. Up next: the IRS, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Social Services Department and even Arcadia Middle School.

He used what he's learned so far to form the basis of Thursday's town hall, the likes of which have become fixtures of his office.

"I'm not being facetious. But the ultimate responsibility falls on you -- elected officials," said 64-year-old Charles Ponds of Campobello.

"You are not doing anything about this."

Inglis said he wants to see a comprehensive immigration bill pushed through Congress, but none are on the horizon.

He believes English should remain America's national language, and would support a U.S. military presence on the Mexican border.

He regularly cited that only six Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers are based in the Upstate; two in the Midlands; and 17 in the Lowcountry.

When people complained about local law enforcement sometimes being told to let illegal aliens go after being taken into custody, Inglis called that a "reality" because of the lack of resources behind immigration officers.

"That tells me the government is not serious about this," said Stanley Seay, 64, of Campobello.

Topics were broad Thursday night. One figure regularly cited was that 62,000 illegal immigrants live in the Upstate, though that number was said to be taken with a grain of salt.

One passionate point of contention was the number of illegal immigrants who genuinely want to be above-board versus those who don't.

"I don't justify that they come. I don't think illegal immigration is the right thing," said 46-year-old Maria Gonzalez of Moore.

"If they came here illegally and nobody gave them a job, they wouldn't want to be here. You don't need to penalize the immigrants. You need to penalize the people who hire them."

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