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## Chamber Delegation Urges Immigration Reform

By Erin E. Fogg   
**Observer Staff Writer**

A delegation representing the Herndon Dulles Chamber of Commerce traveled to Capitol Hill Tuesday to convince congressmen of the country's pressing need to work toward enacting comprehensive immigration reform.

The visit came just days before the House of Representatives was expected to clear a tough border security measure that would make it a federal crime to live in the country illegally.

Of course, Senate approval and signage by President George W. Bush is required before a bill becomes law. However, business leaders have begun urging Congress to consider a comprehensive bill that would enact a guest worker program and grant temporary legal status to the millions of illegal immigrants already in the United States.

Such a bill is still being called for by the Bush administration.

The Chamber delegation was comprised of chairwoman Pat Williams and president and CEO Eileen Curtis, as well as members of the chamber's Hispanic Business Committee, Raul Danny Vargas and Charles Tievsky.

Joined by Herndon Mayor Michael O'Reilly and Fairfax County Supervisor Joan DuBois, the delegation met with Congressmen Tom Davis and Frank Wolf to communicate its sense of urgency in working toward a more comprehensive solution.

At a press conference back in Herndon that evening, Williams outlined the delegation's perspective of the national issue and some key items to note in the debate.

"We're appreciative to our elected officials for standing with us," she said. "But we want them to go beyond what we've been reading in the paper is going on on Capitol Hill."

Comprehensive immigration reform could include a guest worker program, Williams said. Such a program would meet the growing demand for unskilled and semiskilled labor, while strengthening national security.

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Improvements in technology and manpower must also be made to make immigration processing more efficient.

Williams said the congressmen were very receptive to the delegation's comments and were eager to listen to all sides of the issue. However, she said she believes they "feel pressure to put something into place right away."

Curtis said the congressmen appeared to understand Herndon's particular perspective of immigration reform, having been unfairly made the "poster child for issues of the nation" while establishing a regulated day labor hiring site.

She said a chamber summit once highlighted the No. 1 challenge to assimilating immigrants into the community is the need to learn the English language. The chamber has since received grants for and begun holding ESL classes and courses for ESL teachers.

"This is very much on the minds of the Northern Virginia business community," Curtis said. "I think they heard us today."

Vargas added that the issues being faced in Herndon are symptomatic of many complex issues at the federal level that need to be addressed.

"That complexity shouldn't stop us from taking the first step and working on the problem sooner rather than later," he said.

The delegation was scheduled to return to Washington, D.C. the following day to meet with other government officials. Williams said the delegation would continue to work on influencing legislation that would respond to its position.

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