

Illegal immigration is crux of Dallas Jewish Women conference

National Council of Jewish Women hopes to produce report for city

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By DIANNE SOLÍS / The Dallas Morning News
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The National Council of Jewish Women will hold a daylong conference on immigration Thursday with a goal of producing a report for the city of Dallas.

The Dallas chapter of the women's organization says tackling tough issues is part of its mission.

And immigration has been an interest of the Council of Jewish Women "forever and ever," said Julie Lowenberg, a co-chair of the conference.

The Dallas chapter, founded in 1913, provides English classes to the foreign-born and advocates for federal proposals to legalize those here illegally, Ms. Lowenberg said.

There are an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States and about 1.6 million in Texas, according to the Department of Homeland Security. A proposal to overhaul the nation's immigration system collapsed in acrimony last year on Capitol Hill.

The Dallas area has been the venue for rolling protests on both sides of the illegal immigration issue. These include walkouts in the Dallas high schools in March 2006 and rallies in late 2007 in support of Irving police cracking down on illegal immigrants.

"On the national level, we believe in legalization with a path for citizenship for those here already and a humane border policy that would exclude criminals," Ms. Lowenberg said.

Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert, who governs a city where one in four people is foreign-born, will open the conference, which will include panels on education, legal and civil rights, the role of religious communities, health care, and how the city of Houston addresses immigration challenges.

Speakers include Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent of the Dallas Independent School District, at a morning plenary session, and Doris Meissner, the former head of the federal government's immigration agency, as the noon keynote speaker.

In 2006, Ms. Meissner co-authored a lengthy report calling for a legalization program for people in the U.S. illegally and for the simplification of the current system of legal immigration. It also recommended making mandatory an electronic employee verification system – a feature in many federal proposals on Capitol Hill and one that has been challenged by business groups.

Already more than 200 people have registered for the conference.

IF YOU GO

Event: Nation of Immigrants: 21st Century Challenges

When: Thursday; on-site registration begins at 8 a.m.; the conference lasts until 2:15 p.m.

Where: Temple Emanu-El, 8500 Hillcrest Road in Dallas

Cost: \$50 per person

More information: Visit www.ncjwdallas.org