

Ellison, Gutiérrez rally for immigration reform

Written by Lydia Schwartz

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Reps. Keith Ellison (D-MN) and Luis Gutiérrez (D-IL) gathered the Latino community at Incarnation Catholic Church in south Minneapolis this past Sunday, Aug. 25 to rally support for a nationwide immigration bill that was passed by the Senate on June 27.

"Today, we are fighting the civil rights movement of our time," said Ellison. "We are helping to establish freedom and human dignity for everyone, making sure that no family is split apart, and making sure that a child who grows up here does not fear deportation. The Latino community is not alone, Americans from every generation stand with you."

US Senate File 744 (The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013) greatly enhances border surveillance – increasing fencing and nearly doubling the number of patrol agents – but it also offers a path to citizenship for undocumented workers residing in America. The legislation adopts a point-based immigration system that will allow the acceptance of immigrants based on professional skills, family relations, and work history in the U.S. Undocumented immigrants would initially need to apply for a newly created Registered Provisional Immigrant status so immigrants would have to pay a fine and fees, any back taxes owed, pass a background check and not have a disqualifying criminal record.

The bill also calls for the creation of a Blue Card program – a temporary legal status available to undocumented immigrants who can demonstrate that they have been in the U.S. performing qualifying agricultural work for a certain amount of time. It removes green card quota limits, eliminating the decades-long wait time for some countries and many high-skilled immigrants and requires extensive use of the federal government's E-Verify by businesses in order to ensure that their workers have the legal right to work in the U.S. The legislation also creates a new INVEST visa, that would allow prospective foreign entrepreneurs to stay in the country and start companies more easily. It also allows for more visas to be allotted to foreign students and allows immigrants illegally brought in as children to apply for registered provisional status.

Because of the bill's amnesty provisions that give undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship, Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) has decided not to introduce the bill to the House floor.

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"In Congress there is a discharge petition for people in the minority party," said Ellison. "The Democrats need 218 signatures and then the bill automatically comes to the floor without the Speaker. You have my commitment that we will work together to bring together those representatives who are against immigration reform."

Gutiérrez, the first Latino to be elected to Congress from the Midwest, is currently chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Immigration Task Force.

"Keith and I are going to vote for comprehensive immigration reform," said the Illinois congressman. "And I believe Republicans will vote for this bipartisan legislation."

Gutiérrez gave up his position as a Ranking Member on the prestigious Financial Services Committee in order to serve on the House Judiciary Committee, which oversees jurisdiction for immigration, where he recently defended military families and their dependents facing separation because of America's current immigration laws.

On Oct. 5, immigration advocates are planning marches and rallies across the nation to show support for this immigration reform bill.

"People have to organize in Minnesota," Gutierrez said. "Today I think a lot of people heard the message, a lot of people get discouraged and today gives them hope. We can win this thing. On Oct. 5, hit the streets all over America and we will have comprehensive immigration reform."