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Morristown plan to police immigrants sparks town hall debate

More than 200 people pack meeting

BY MINHAJ HASSAN
DAILY RECORD

MORRISTOWN -- Mayor Donald Cresitello and town council listened Tuesday night to nearly three hours of citizen testimony on his plan to deputize town police as federal immigration agents.

More than 200 people jammed the council chambers and spilled into the hallways, offering often strong opinions for and against the mayor's plan.

Bottom line: Cresitello is sticking by his guns and proceeding with the application to deputize the police in town.

After the hours of testimony, Cresitello said, "Don't tell me we don't need to enforce immigration laws. There are thousands of people crossing the line, who are criminals."

He also vowed that "we will never, ever profile."

The mayor said he had asked ministers to open churches to help mostly Hispanic day laborers who gather on town streets seeking work.

Takes on clerics

"Not one minister has done anything significant" to address stacking, prostitution, or slavery, he said. "But they'll put the basket out to take their money," the mayor said of the church collection plates.

In the past, police investigations on criminal aliens were hampered because local police did not have enough authority to go after them.

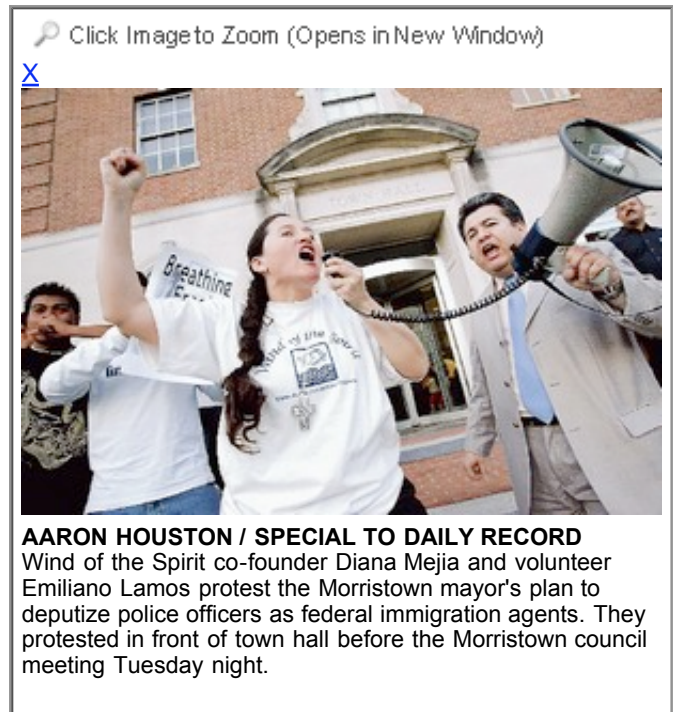
"We did not have the authority to intervene," the mayor said. "It made it look like we didn't care."

He said near his own home there were cases of money laundering, prostitution and slavery that involve illegal aliens.

Among those rising to speak was Ruby Winston of Hillairy Avenue. She said she backs the mayor's policy. "I'm with you 100 percent, you can count on that. I did office cleaning for 20 years and lost my job to the illegals," she told the mayor and council. She also said it's not true that Americans won't do jobs that immigrants will.

Outside support

Miguel Cruz of You Don't Speak for Me, an American-Hispanic organization opposed to illegal immigration said, "It



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is time to recognize the severe problem that it is."

"I had 17 people living across the street (in a single residence)," said Walker Avenue resident Jamie Ramsfelder. She said she couldn't walk in the area without some of those illegal aliens making inappropriate remarks.

She added that one of the illegal immigrants had urinated in the hedges, and another was so drunk he fell asleep in the bushes and almost froze to death.

Ramsfelder's husband, Jonathan, who also supports Cresitello's proposal, said, "The only thing I'm disappointed about is that it is not law yet."

Longtime resident Bob Tracy said "Thank God they gave us a young man who had the guts (to stand up to the illegal aliens problem)," referring to Cresitello. Tracy said he was "surprised and couldn't believe" there are were so many people in the council chambers "for illegality."

His remarks prompted applause.

Resident Ralph Bacharach said, "I think it's an opportunity for Morristown to take a leadership role."

While he respects hardworking immigrants who came to make a better life for themselves and their families, "that doesn't give them the right to break the laws of this community."

John A Rucki, co-chairman of the New Jersey Citizens for Immigration Control, based in Carlstadt, supported the policy. He said there are more than 600,000 illegal aliens who are either murderers or rapists, killed children or police officers in the nation.

He also blamed employers for exacerbating the problem.

"Those employers who aid or abet should get a "Go to Jail card," he said.

He pointed out that the deputization program does not enable police officers to conduct active sweeps. "That's part of the agreement."

On the other hand

Opponents of the mayor's deputization plan just about balanced the testimony supporting him.

Otto Maduro said "We will all pay very dearly if this policy is implemented. Hispanics are becoming the scapegoat."

Tom Clark-Shakir, an imam of The Islamic Clergyman Dedicated to the Leadership of W.D. Mohammed Ministry, "He's being influenced by small group of people who are turning him into a wicked man. It is a Gestapo tactic. Hitler started the same way."

Town resident David Silva said the program "is not a good measure for Morristown. I don't want to live in a place that's prejudiced."

He added that taking such a position ignores the positive contributions the immigrant community has made in Morristown.

Resident Tony Garcia said the program "directly targets the increasingly dominant Hispanic community and other minorities."

Intent of program

Town lawyers said the deputization program, formally known as 287-G, is intended for local law enforcement agencies to address the issue of criminal aliens.

Under the plan, up to 10 police officers would go through about five weeks of training from the Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE) that would enable them to enforce immigration laws.

Councilman Timothy Jackson asked whether the program would give police officers the ability to "supersede" probable cause when going after illegal immigrants.

The lawyers said no.

Councilman John Cryan asked that if a police officer stopped an illegal alien for jaywalking, could that officer then check their citizenship status.

Lawyers said that in theory, they could.

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