

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **Daily Record**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

05/3/07 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

State: Don't deputize Morristown cops as immigration agents

Latino groups issue report against plan, say they asked Corzine to speak out

**BY MINHAJ HASSAN
DAILY RECORD**

MORRISTOWN -- Gov. Jon S. Corzine's office issued a statement Wednesday coming out against Mayor Donald Cresitello's plan to deputize police officers to enforce immigration laws.

The announcement came on the same day Latino organizations held a press conference in Morristown to announce a report they had produced on immigration reform. Leaders of the organizations said during the press conference they had asked Corzine to intercede in the Morristown debate.

"This complicated problem should not be addressed piecemeal at the local level," said Brendan Gilfillan, a spokesman for the governor. "This effort to deputize police to enforce federal immigration laws is not comprehensive immigration reform and, by undermining the critical trust communities must have with law enforcement, will actually hinder our law enforcement."

Cresitello said he didn't care what the governor's office had to say.

"No public official should interfere with Morristown's attempt to deputize police," Cresitello said.

At the press conference, Martin Perez described the different approaches the mayors of Morristown and Hightstown, a tiny borough in Mercer County, have taken to address the issue of illegal immigration.


Perez, head of the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, said Cresitello's approach basically amounts to a form of "ethnic cleansing" to "isolate, denigrate, and stigmatize" the Latino population by applying to the federal government to give town police officers the ability to enforce immigration laws.

"His policies will fail from a law enforcement and a human level," Perez said.

In response, Cresitello said, "I don't know if it's worthy of a comment," adding "they don't know Donald Cresitello."


The mayor also said that he is not anti-Latino and that he has made financial contributions to the Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center in the past.

Prior to the Morristown press conference, a similar event was held in Hightstown, where Mayor Robert F. Patten has embraced the Latino population.

 [Click Image to Zoom \(Opens in New Window\)](#)

BOB KARP / DAILY RECORD

Martin Perez, president of the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, holds up the Latino Perspectives report, Wednesday.

 [Click Image to Zoom \(Opens in New Window\)](#)

BOB KARP / DAILY RECORD

Daniel Santo Pietro, right, executive director of the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey, joined Xiomara Guevara, left, and Martin Perez, on Wednesday to talk about Morristown Mayor Donald Cresitello's plan to enforce federal immigration laws.

Suggestions for immigration reform

Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey and the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey created a report, called "On the Verge of Crisis: A Broken Immigration System" that outlines seven ways to address the undocumented immigrants problem. Their recommendations include:

- The federal government passing a comprehensive immigration reform policy.
- Stopping raids performed by the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- Gov. Jon S. Corzine signing an executive order to enable all children to receive physical and mental health care, regardless of legal status.
- Allow well-performing immigrant students to pay in-state tuition.
- Provide driving privilege cards for those who can't provide their immigration status.
- Making sure everyone is being paid fairly for each day's work.
- Ending scams aimed at the immigrant population.

Related Articles:

- [Cresitello putting target on immigrant 'criminals'](#)
- [Rally for immigrants rights](#)

Advertisement

Patten concedes while his position on immigrants is unpopular in some circles, he believes it is the right thing to do in his 1-square-mile borough of 5,200 residents. About one-third of its residents are Latino.

"I believe in fairness for everybody," said Patten, a former physical education teacher. "I carried it to the political arena." In Hightstown, Patten meets every month with the Latino Advisory Committee to address any concerns. There is also an Equity Coalition, comprised of clergy, business owners and laborers to discuss issues.

"Nothing has been lost with the immigrants (in town)," Patten said. He said the Latino community stimulates the borough's economy since people make purchases in their stores and use services provided by them.

While he is familiar with the 287G program from the Department of Homeland Security, which enables local police officers to enforce immigration laws, he believes the police should not be carrying out those duties.

"We are not interested in doing that," he said. "That is a federal matter. I cannot justify stopping someone on the street for identification without probable cause."

Patten believes 287G will undoubtedly lead to profiling. "Who is going to stop me?" asked Patten, who is white.

Cresitello has vowed the police department will not profile if 287G is implemented.

Patten said early-morning raids that took place in the town in previous years had strained relationships between the local police and the immigrant population, even though the work was being done by ICE agents.

"They come in and say 'police,'" Patten said about ICE agents' encounters at immigrants' homes when conducting searches. "We had a distrust and lack of respect."

To address that problem, Patten said the borough council passed a resolution, drafted by the police chief, that states when ICE agents come to town, they treat the residents with respect.

His standing with the Latino population helped him win reelection two years ago by less than 30 votes, he said.

Patten said the housing code is enforced in the borough strictly to address overcrowding, or stacking.

Unlike Morristown, Hightstown doesn't have day laborers congregating or excessive loitering in the business zones, Patten said.

Daniel Santo Pietro, executive director of HAD, said Cresitello uses "distortion to support his position." He said Cresitello describes the 287G program as "a silver bullet" that will solve the immigration problem, which Pietro said is misleading. He said the raids ICE is conducting are counterproductive that aren't just focused on serious crimes.

"The fact is they are doing a very arbitrary job...and it's destroying families," he said.

Minhaj Hassan can be reached at (973) 267-9038 or mhassan@gannett.com.
