



Springfield seeks to be immigrant friendly city

But political action committee says the move won't reverse population declines.

POLITICS

By **Michael Cooper**

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Sticking with the story

The Springfield News-Sun has written about Welcome Springfield since the organization formed in February.

Key Quotes

Walt Vanderbush, Miami University of Oxford professor of Latin American and Latino/a studies, said his first reaction to the news of welcoming immigrants to Ohio cities is "fully positive."

"I think the future of the U.S. and Southwest Ohio is to be ahead of the curve. We certainly had a reputation in the past of being on the other side."

"I think if we see both Cincinnati and Dayton are both committed to being immigrant friendly, I think that has the potential the change the overall environment for the foreign-born population to be more comfortable here (in Ohio)."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio: "The recent wave of unaccompanied minors underscores the need for comprehensive immigration reform. We can't address our nation's broken immigration system by lurching from one crisis to another."

"The Senate has passed a bipartisan bill that would secure our borders, boost the economy, and create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are willing to meet strict but fair requirements."



comprehensive immigration reform while Congress considers emergency funding to address this crisis.”

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio: "I do think we need to be open to immigration that is legal. The problem that we're seeing on the boarder right now is sort of the opposite of that which is that we don't have a good legal immigration system that helps to ensure we have a secure border, that we have rules that are followed so the people that are waiting patiently in line to come through the legal system are not passed up by those who come illegally.

“I’m supportive of legal immigration, always have been. It enriches our country and specifically with our economy today we need a lot of skills of folks who would like to come to this country.”

City leaders sent a message to residents last week: Immigrants and their businesses are welcome in Springfield.

However one statewide political action committee believes bringing immigrants to municipal areas isn’t the way to turn around population declines in Ohio cities.

Commissioners unanimously approved a resolution last week that calls for the city to adopt policies that promote the inclusion and integration of immigrants in the community.

Springfield will join other cities like Dayton and Columbus that have formed Welcoming America, a voluntary network of immigrant friendly communities. Last week Cincinnati also launched a new task force on the issue.

The city was approached about the legislation by Welcome Springfield, a nonprofit organization founded earlier this year to advocate for new foreign-born residents. With the growing Hispanic population in Springfield, it made sense to pass the resolution, Mayor Warren Copeland said.

A proactive approach toward immigrants also can stem population losses that threaten economic stability, the resolution says.

“We have these folks in our community and they need to be included and considered part of the community,” Copeland said.

It sends a statement both to immigrants and businesses who employ immigrants, said Welcome Springfield Executive Director Carl Ruby, a South Charleston resident.



Ruby has met with Clark County commissioners and hopes they'll pass a similar resolution in the future. Welcome Springfield is also working with a variety of organizations to help immigrants tackle both health-care and financial literacy challenges.

The Ohio Jobs & Justice Political Action Committee, however, believes many of the immigrants aren't starting businesses and have a difficult time assimilating to the United States. It eventually leads to them accepting social services, founder Steve Salvi said.

Salvi called the resolution "an insult" to city residents and said it won't reverse a declining population. Springfield should work to attract U.S. citizens back to the area.

"No one hates immigrants," Salvi said. "(Residents) are already welcoming. Why do you have to put it down on paper? It just doesn't make any sense to me."

The vast majority of immigrants are hard-working people who are trying to make a contribution to the community and raise families, Copeland said.

"That's what we want in citizens," he said. "If they are legal, hard-working citizens following the law, we want to welcome them to Springfield."

Boler Cuy Castellanos, a native of Guatemala, moved to the area last August with his wife, Diana, a Springfield native. He opened his own business, Boler's Garage, 412 Linden Ave., last October after moving from Pennsylvania.

Compared to other areas he's lived in across the United States, he said Springfield has been friendly and the city's resolution is good news for immigrants.

"It sounds very nice to open the doors to people coming from other countries," Cuy Castellanos said.

The resolution, however, doesn't mean the city is open to sheltering children from the southern border, Copeland said.

From a year-long debate on broader immigration reform, an immediate humanitarian crisis has emerged at the country's southern border.



At issue is a 2008 law designed to protect children from trafficking by gangs and other criminals. Minors from other countries are allowed to make their case directly to an immigration judge; that process can take years amid a backlog of cases. In the meantime, those children remain in the U.S. with family members or with sponsors while they await hearings in the clogged system.

House Republicans and Senate Democrats advanced competing proposals last week for dealing with the influx of tens of thousands of young migrants. Each side quickly ruled the other's approach unacceptable, leaving any solution unclear with Congress' annual August recess looming.

Comments by Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley recently stirred controversy when she said Dayton was willing to be a destination if Congress approves funding to shelter the children.

Springfield's resolution has no connection to that issue, Copeland said. The city has no capacity to deal with the children, he said.

"As a community, we're not offering to have kids brought here who've been coming across the border," Copeland said. "I know some other communities have been doing that. We don't feel we're ready to do that. That's not what this is about. These discussions began long before the current discussion about the border."

Staff writers Thomas Gnau, Chelsey Levingston, Lot Tan, Michael D. Pitman and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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