

Caputo, Hugo Address Immigration Group
They explain related legislation passed in Richmond.



[By Bonnie Hobbs, Centre View](#)
Wednesday, May 07, 2008



[Email this Article](#)
[Print this Article](#)

As the local community continues wrestling with the issue of immigration, two state delegates addressed a group of residents about immigration-related legislation in the most recent session of Virginia's General Assembly.

Sponsored by the Outreach Committee of Wellspring United Church of Christ in Centreville, the group gathered April 24 in Centreville's Fire Station 17. At the outset, attendees introduced themselves and gave their reasons for coming.

Sarah Little, for example, said she'd like to keep Fairfax County from "repeating Prince William County's blunders" in so severely dealing with immigrants. And Hilary Reilly came to inform herself about "what options are viable."

"We're all searching for solutions here, and we want to know how the state can help us with community integration, instead of disintegration," said Alice Foltz of Wellspring. "How can we build a strong community and keep from falling apart?"

Del. Chuck Caputo (D-67) said immigration was "one of the big topics" during the Jan. 9-March 13 legislative session. Numerous bills about it were introduced in both the House and Senate. Those that passed, were signed by Gov. Tim Kaine and will take effect July 1 are as follows:

- * Illegal aliens charged with certain crimes, such as those involving drugs or violence, will be denied bail;
- * Prisons must report inmates' immigration status to ICE;
- * It's illegal for contractors to work for state or public entities if they knowingly hire illegals.
- * Companies engaging in the above practice will have their business licenses revoked.

Bills not heard and, therefore, killed would have: Denied drivers licenses for all illegal immigrants, prohibited localities from providing

benefits to them; made it illegal to harbor or transport illegal immigrants; forced employers to electronically verify employment eligibility of their employees; denied in-state tuition to illegal immigrants; and required all public schools to verify each student's legal presence and help these students become legal.

"The key thing for immigrants and people of low incomes is having affordable housing available," said Caputo. "So I introduced a bill to study incentives to private industry, banks and builders to come up with more affordable housing. But it didn't go anywhere."

Oakton's Carol Pruitt asked what the general sentiment in the House was toward illegal immigrants in Virginia and whether delegates in the northern and southern parts of the state differed in their opinions on this issue.

"You try to represent your constituency and your community," replied Caputo. "Delegates Frederick and Marshall believe illegal immigrants should get no benefits. I believe you go after employers not obeying the rules, such as those not paying unemployment-compensation premiums. Businesses that don't pay these premiums under-bid other businesses on jobs, so the law-abiding businesses asked me to go after them."

Caputo said it's a Class 1 misdemeanor — punishable by a year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine — to hire illegals. But, he added, "It's all over the waterfront in terms of what people believe."

"Has this issue and emotion seen its peak in Richmond, or will this continue to be an issue?" asked Wellspring's George Crossman. "I think we're over the hump," answered Caputo. "There are much more important things we need to focus on — transportation, education, affordable health [care]."

"It seems to me, we had about 140 bills in the General Assembly about this issue, but not because they served some purpose, but because of political expediency," said Mukit Hussein of Project Hope and Harmony. "We only seem to use this issue when people are running for election."

"Are you really trying to solve the problem so we can actually have a reasonable and fair immigration law?" asked Hussein. "Are Virginia legislators trying to lobby the federal legislators? Because anyway you slice it, it's mostly a federal issue." Caputo said he wasn't aware of any specific action, but noted that "there's constituent pressure on them."

Del. Tim Hugo (R-40) said he believes in immigration and thinks the country needs it. "I work with high-tech and we need these brilliant minds working here," he said. "Now, there are less people allowed in, so

they're going to other places like India and Ireland. What's holding it up on the federal level is the amnesty issue."

"Chuck and I try to deal with the local issues, but it's not just a federal issue," continued Hugo. "I think we have a role, too. I think a lot of businesses are attracting these people here because they hire illegal immigrants. That's why we passed the law that, if a business is convicted of a federal immigration violation, it could lose its business license in Virginia."

"Perhaps, if it were easier for people to get work visas, we wouldn't have so much illegal immigration," replied Foltz. "And there's a huge backlog." Agreeing, Hussein said, "Many of these people — who go through a horrible journey, come here and almost get killed — wouldn't come here if it wasn't a human-rights issue [in their homelands]. And then they get treated like dirt."

"We are not unsympathetic," responded Suzanne Klegka of Centre Ridge. "My family are immigrants, but they came here legally, and we are a nation of laws."

Hugo said it's wrong when people stay in the U.S. on expired visas. Regarding human rights, he said he realizes many immigrants are "hard-working people looking for a better life." However, when Morse asked why anyone who wants to come here can't, Hugo said it's because "we can't afford it as a country."

"But the federal government has always turned its back on the fact that illegal immigration was occurring," said Fran Durocher, a retired physician. "And what are you going to do with all these people who are here? You can't kick them out — you have to bring them into the culture."



©2011 [Connection Newspapers](#). All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#)
1606 King Street ♦ Alexandria, VA 22314 ♦ 703-821-5050
Site Design, Development and Hosting by [Timberlake Publishing](#)

[Subscribe to our email editions here.](#)

