

Immigration bill sparks rally

Groups peacefully gather to speak out against legislation

By Tara Flockhart / Daily Staff Writer | Monday, April 10, 2006 2:00 AM CDT

DES MOINES - Chants of "U.S.A." and "Si, se puede (yes, it's possible)" could be heard Sunday in Des Moines from the more than 5,000 people gathering to rally against proposed federal immigration legislation.

Most of the primarily Latino crowd dressed in white shirts at the request of the event organizers, a coalition called United for the Safety and Dignity of Immigrants, to illustrate that the event was peaceful. They were also encouraged to bring a white flower as a message of friendship and a colored flower to honor those who died in an attempt to cross the border.

American flags dotted the crowd along with signs displaying messages such as "Imagine a day without immigrants" to rally against legislation that would strengthen border security and increase penalties for illegal immigrants.

"We are Americans, too. Please hear us," said Juan Carlos Gomez, a speaker at the event. "We are not here to take, but to give."

The rally took place one day earlier than Monday's "National Day of Action for Immigrant Justice" that is predicted to bring hundreds of thousands of people to the streets of more than 90 cities.

Small groups of ISU students attended Sunday's event, including members of the Sigma Lambda Beta fraternity and the Latino Heritage Month committee.

"We have an immigration problem, not a problem with immigrants," said Luke Gran, senior in forestry, adding that several friends and his favorite professor have had problems with legalization.

"We need a faster process - it's just not working."

Zaal Tonia, senior in physics and treasurer of the ACLU @ ISU, said the subject hit him closer to the heart because his father immigrated from the former Soviet Union about 20 years ago.

"The bill overall is a bad idea," he said. "Making 11 million immigrants criminals is impossible."

Kenyan native Joan Nanachemo, Des Moines resident, said she came to the United States for a better life for herself and her children.

"I want to see my children's dreams come true," she said, in regard to the better education in the United States. "They want to be doctors."

In addition to protesting the proposed legislation at the rally, the coalition also asked people to stay home from school and work on May 1, the Latino equivalent of Labor Day.

Following the rally, those in attendance were given the option of marching to St. Ambrose Cathedral.

Although the rally was primarily focused on immigration, other people hoping to make their message heard were also in attendance.

This included a group from Sudan that was trying to raise awareness about the 400,000 people that have been killed since 2003 from genocide in Darfur.