

## Speaker Says Congress Likely to Take Up Immigration Reform in Fall

By Bill Howard

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (CNS) -- A new immigration reform bill could be proposed to Congress this fall, and diocesan offices and other groups dealing with immigration and refugee services should be prepared, said Kevin Appleby, director of migration and refugee policy for the U.S. bishops in Washington.

Appleby's comments came at the end of a Justice for Immigrants gathering in mid-May of representatives of Catholic and secular organizations in Colorado and other states.

Justice for Immigrants is a campaign of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops with the goals of educating the public and Catholic community about migration and immigrants; creating political will for positive immigration reform; enacting legislative and administrative reforms based on the bishops' principles; and organizing Catholic networks to help qualified immigrants obtain the benefits of reform.

President Barack Obama is expected to meet June 8 with members of Congress to revisit immigration reform. Appleby said he believes the meeting is the president's effort to gauge where legislators stand nearly two years after a tense debate on immigration reform ended with no bill being passed.

Speaking May 20 to participants at the gathering, Appleby said the ideal time frame would be a new bill proposed in the fall and a vote taken no later than next April.

Appleby's announcement sent a charge through what was until then a low-key meeting meant to coordinate efforts and strategies among the attendees.

Within minutes of the announcement, the Diocese of Colorado Springs arranged a prayer vigil for the evening of June 7 at its largest Spanish-speaking parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Colorado Springs.

In addition to prayer vigils, parishes also were urged to add an intercession to the faithful in both English and Spanish during Masses each weekend leading up to Obama's June meeting. Another idea was to call one's representatives in Congress and simply let them know that their constituents are serious about finding a solution to immigration problems.

In an interview with The Colorado Catholic Herald, newspaper of the Colorado Springs Diocese, Appleby said one of the most debated topics likely will be on the future flow of immigrants to and from the United States. Businesses want a temporary worker program while labor unions want a commission to determine who will come.

"This will be a tough negotiation and more problematic with (the state of) the economy," he said.

Appleby said the family is also a "target" during the debate because 65 percent of the green cards that allow immigrants to legally live in the U.S. go to family members each year.

In the last major immigration reform debate, some legislators wanted more green cards to go to immigrants with work skills. A point system was discussed and will likely be considered again, Appleby said, which could lead to more immigrants not being able to bring their families into the country.

He said the debate on reform will be different this time, because the process has been done before and everyone has a better idea of what issues to focus on.

"We have learned not to take anything for granted, that this issue does not fall along party lines, and not to underestimate our opponents," he said about his USCCB office.

During a plenary session for the Justice for Immigrants meeting, Appleby highlighted four reasons why the Catholic Church should be involved in the debate for immigration reform:

-- It is an institutional issue, and part of the fabric of the church is that it is an immigrant church.

-- Scripture shows numerous examples of migration, which is also a theme in many encyclicals. The church teaches that people have a right to migrate if it's to support themselves so they can survive, and they also have a right not to migrate.

-- It is a humanitarian issue. Immigration impacts human beings, and life is at risk when people are exploited by smugglers or have to cross deserts.

-- The Church provides a global perspective nobody else can give. Next to one's family, immigrants usually turn next to their church when they need help.

Celebrating a Mass to open the Justice for Immigrants gathering May 19, Denver  
Archbishop Charles J. Chaput acknowledged the issue of immigration reform is a touchy subject for many people and told attendees to stay focused in their mission despite any backlash they may encounter.

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