

Hispanics Plan October March in Washington

Opposition to Proposition 187 highlighted

by Angela Rabago-Mussi

Faced with increasing anti-immigration rhetoric, Hispanics across the nation are planning their first organized march on the nation's capital October 12.

A recruitment effort is beginning in the Valley, and a group in Tucson hopes to send busloads and, possibly, planeloads of supporters from Arizona to the event, being called the March for Justice.

"There are issues being brought forth that directly affect us, and we need to confront them and try to get the truth out," said Jesus Romo Vejar, a Tucson lawyer who has been helping to organize the march since 1994.

The idea for the march began at a conference of Hispanic groups in Tucson the year after Californians passed Proposition 187, a law to deny public education, social services and non-emergency health care to undocumented immigrants.

Since then, immigration has become a hot topic for politicians, Romo Vejar said, and organizers hope this march will give the Hispanic community a voice in the debate.

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"We knew that during the 1996 elections issues of immigration were going to be used to promote fear," he said. "Now, there's more of a need to get together and more of a will."

Kevin De Leon, who is helping organize the march, said it will show the strength of Hispanics, the fastest-growing minority group in the country.

"Everybody knows Washington, D.C. — pro-choice groups, pro-life groups, African-Americans, the gay community — but the Latino community has yet to go to the nation's capital where every decision is made that affects our lives," De Leon said.

Issues that the march will promote include human, constitutional and educational rights for all; affirmative action; public-health services; citizen police review boards; a \$7-per-hour minimum wage; and extending the date of eligibility for amnesty for illegal immigrants.

"We're not saying the march is a panacea for all our ills, but it's a long-term approach," De Leon said.

Many Hispanics, who may be immigrants or whose parents or grandparents may have emigrated to the United States, see anti-immigrant talk and measures such as Proposition 187 as anti-Hispanic, he said.

To counter that, march organizers want to show that the Hispanic heritage has been a positive input in the United States, said Ivan Gutierrez, who is recruiting marchers in the Washington, D.C. region.

"We want to show that Hispanics in the United States have made a crucial contribution to this country from the beginning. This is a nation of immigrants. They don't come here to get on welfare, they come here to work."

"[The march] will show the strength of Hispanics, the fastest-growing minority group in the country."

The organizers chose October 12 as the day for the march because it is *Dia de la Raza*, a day when Hispanics celebrate their heritage and culture. It is also Columbus Day.

"It's very tragic that in our country on the Statue of Liberty we have a very beautiful saying and now we have forgotten that heritage," said Maria Elena Milton, who is recruiting Valley residents to get involved in the march. The inscription on the statue reads: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled

masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door." [Editor's note: *Contrary to popular perception, the Emma Lazarus poem is on a plaque inside the pedestal of "Liberty Enlightening the World." The poem was placed there in 1903, two decades after the statue was finally erected.*]

Organizers will not say how many people they expect to march.

"It's much more difficult (to organize) than the African-American march was," De Leon said, referring to the Million Man March held October 16.

"The East Coast is heavily populated with African-American communities. But the majority of Latinos live in the Southwest, even though there is a large population in Chicago and Miami and New York."

Organizers said other comparisons have been drawn between this march and the Million Man March.

"I would say it's similar but not the same. That march was for men in particular; we're inviting all Hispanics and all people who want to join," Gutierrez said.

The Hispanic march also lacks a clear, national leader such as Ben Chavis or Louis Farrakhan.

"For better or worse there are no Latino Farrakhans, but there are a lot of true leaders in the trenches at the local level," De Leon said. "After this march we may see new

leaders, individuals who become leaders with this march."

Organizers are relying on those local leaders to step up and recruit marchers. For instance, Romo Vejar's group, *Derechos Humanos* in Tucson, has been holding weekly meetings to discuss plans for the march. *Derechos Humanos* is a human-rights organization that includes members from churches and labor unions.

The group has held dances to raise funds to send people to Washington for the march and is

arranging for buses to drive there. Romo Vejar said the group also is trying to recruit people from smaller Arizona cities, such as Yuma and Gila Bend.

De Leon hopes marchers will include all people concerned about Hispanic issues nationwide.

"No matter how many people do show up, it will be an exciting and historic event." □

This call for action is taken from the internet:

**NATIONAL CHICANO MARCH
AGAINST THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION
August 12 — San Diego, California**

The Chicano Mexican community is under siege. The RepubliKKKan Party, as attacker of our communities, is public enemy number one in our fight for survival and self-determination. The National Chicano Moratorium Committee, Raza Rights Coalition and other organizations are organizing a national Raza March against the RepubliKKKan convention being held in San Diego, CA. We are also organizing a National Raza Unity Convention on Sunday, August 11. The [internet home] page will be updated frequently as Marcha organizing progresses.

Demands of the March:

Rescind Proposition 187

Rescind "English Only" laws

Annul the "Clinton Crime Bill"

No social or education cutbacks

Abolish the INS and Border Patrol

Demolish the border

Annul NAFTA

Impeach Pete Wilson