

Prince William County Takes Next Step On Illegal

When Prince William County (VA.) Supervisor John Stirrup got home last night following a marathon, twelve-hour session of the county board on tougher measures on illegal immigration, his wife Heidi and daughter Sarah had long gone to bed. "The only one up when I got home was the dog, and he looked at me as if to say 'What are you doing up at this hour?', quipped a bleary-eyed Stirrup when I spoke to him this afternoon.

It was something of a miracle that Stirrup was up and available for an interview. In what is beginning to be par for the course in the Northern Virginia county as it wrestles with its mounting crisis of illegal aliens absorbing county services, more than 350 speakers packed the county meeting, which ran from 2 PM to 2 AM yesterday. Incendiary rhetoric flew like shrapnel, as the eight-member County Board of Supervisors debated the next step to take after its vote over the summer empowering police to ask residents if they were in the US illegally or not (and, if not, to arrest them and turn them over to federal immigration authorities for deportation).

In the end, the county fathers voted eight-to-nothing to recommend restrictions on services that would be available to illegal immigrants and to create a new police unit to deal exclusively with the alien crisis. As was the earlier measure, these latest steps were the work of Supervisor Stirrup.

"We could have done more," Stirrup told me today, noting that he and his colleagues "pared down significantly" the list of services to which they considered barring illegal immigrants from accessing. In the end, eight such services, ranging from rental and mortgage assistance to a substance prevention program in the county jail, were denied illegal immigrants. In Stirrup's words, "It's a good start, and another step" after the "first strike" the county took last summer.

Amid cries of "racist" and "xenophobe" at the meeting last night--not to mention a new lawsuit against the county filed by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund--Stirrup and his colleagues (six Republicans, two Democrats) also voted to create the new Criminal Alien Unit within the county police. According to Stirrup, the CAU -- inspired, the supervisor added, by County Police Chief Charlie Deane -- will have seven new officers and a budget of \$975,000 for the balance of the fiscal year.

The officers in the CAU will be "trained to enforce immigration laws" and work with the 287-G federal partnership (in which local law enforcement officials are trained to enforce federal immigration laws), Stirrup said.

Both Stirrup and County Board Chairman Cory Stewart have long made the point to us that the rising crime rate in their county is directly related to the flood of illegal immigrants, that 21% of the detainees in the county jail are illegal immigrants. As Stirrup said, "The exact number is 720, and another 720 have been farmed out to other prisons. 56 illegal immigrants have been sent [back to federal authorities] for deportation."

The invective and resultant national publicity notwithstanding, are the tough new measures stemming the tide of illegal immigrants into the second-largest Northern Virginia county? In John Stirrup's words, "It's already starting to work."

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