

**Congressmen get low rating;  
Immigrants rip state delegation**

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By Oscar Avila

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The Illinois congressional delegation barely earned a passing grade in protecting immigrants and refugees, activists said Tuesday in their first evaluation of lawmakers.

To publicize their "report card" on immigrant issues, about 1,300 activists descended on 12 of the members' local offices from Batavia to Carbondale. Amid a sea of American flags and a crowd chanting in several languages, speakers at a downtown rally urged Congress to reverse policies enacted after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"As a nation, we have to bring equal rights and fair treatment for all immigrants," said Henry Tamarin, president of Local 1 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union. "We're here for that message."

The lobbying effort was part of "New Americans Action Day," a coordinated political outreach to members of Congress in 17 states.

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, along with other advocates, gave lawmakers a D+ grade, saying the state's delegation has done a poor job protecting refugees and immigrants involved in labor disputes.

Organizers analyzed the delegation's vote on more than 50 bills to compile the grade. Many of the votes involve security measures after last year's terror attacks, such as a bill requiring that all airport screeners be U.S. citizens.

Advocates credited the state's delegation for supporting legislation that loosens requirements for small groups of undocumented immigrants applying for legal status. Critics call the program, known as 245(i), a temporary amnesty.

The lobbying comes on the heels of a more ambitious bill introduced last week by Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and other Democratic lawmakers that would legalize millions of undocumented immigrants who meet certain criteria.

Groups favoring stricter immigration say Illinois elected officials should not apologize for opposing liberalized immigration laws that would threaten security.

"The public has no taste for this right now," said Dan Stein, executive director of the Federation

for American Immigration Reform. "People are fed up with apologists for illegal immigration."

But Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) told immigrants that their political participation can help sway her colleagues.

"Your voices and your passion are invaluable," she said.