

Area Lawmakers Against Immigration Plan

By Eric Krol - Daily Herald Political Writer

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The controversial immigration plan President Bush touted in Tuesday night's State of the Union speech has minimal support among suburban congressmen of either political stripe.

Suburban Republican lawmakers say Bush's plan, which would give illegal immigrants legal status for up to six years while they worked, goes too far.

"I'm afraid it's going to turn into another amnesty program," said U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert, a Hinsdale Republican.

Democrats argue Bush's plan doesn't go far enough.

"It's the wrong approach. He does nothing about the people currently living here," said U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springfield Democrat. Durbin favors setting up a system where illegal immigrants already here could earn citizenship if they reach goals.

Out of Illinois' seven suburban House members and two senators, only one - Sen. Peter Fitzgerald, an Inverness Republican - actively backs Bush's plan. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Yorkville Republican, has not commented yet, but past comments indicate he favors reforms similar to the Bush plan.

Fitzgerald said Bush's plan "provides a compassionate way for undocumented, productive workers to emerge from the shadows and become taxpaying U.S. citizens while not compromising our security."

But Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park said he's skeptical of the Bush plan exactly because of security concerns. Kirk said it could lead to illegal immigrants from countries with ties to terrorism gaining citizenship status. Tailoring the plan to Mexico, which doesn't pose a terrorist threat, might get Bush a better reception, Kirk said.

Northbrook Democrat Lee Goodman, who is running to oppose Kirk this fall in the 10th Congressional District, also gave a thumbs-down to Bush's plan, but for a different reason.

"It leads to a permanent underclass of people who feel they're not part of the country," Goodman said.

Bush also called for making permanent last year's tax cuts, a suggestion that divides the candidates in the 8th Congressional District, which includes parts of Cook and Lake counties.

"Any tax cut is beneficial to the economy because it promotes growth," said U.S. Rep. Phil Crane, a Wauconda Republican, who added he'd like to see the tax on stock dividends eliminated altogether.

Republican challenger David Phelps of Crystal Lake cited budget deficits for opposing Bush's tax-cut call.

"I don't know if we can afford to make those tax cuts permanent," said Phelps, who supports doing away with the income tax in favor of a consumption tax.

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, an Evanston Democrat, blasted Bush's handling of the economy and taxes.

"To make these tax cuts which favor the rich and lead to record deficits is an irresponsible policy," said Schakowsky, whose district includes part of Des Plaines.