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Nashville coalition pushes immigration changes

Group meets in advance of U.S. reform talks

By Janell Ross
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One week before the Obama administration is set to begin talks about immigration policy reform, a Nashville coalition gathered Monday to announce plans to ignite what they call a "productive community conversation" about immigration here.

"Our premise is that a more informed public is a more reasonable public," said Avi Poster, president of The Coalition for Education about Immigration and participant in Nashville's Reform Immigration for America Campaign.

The campaign is part of a national effort to lobby Congress to alter the nation's immigration policy, limit any surge in anti-immigrant sentiment and generate public support for so-called comprehensive immigration policy reform.

The Nashville group released few details of its plans. Poster said the group will host a series of public forums to discuss immigration and related issues and share information about the impact of current policies.

In Nashville, a city that in the last 15 years has seen its population and social landscape dramatically altered by immigration, there is a critical need for these types of conversations, said the Rev. Sonnye Dixon, pastor of Hobson United Methodist Church and a member of the local campaign.

"There is what I would call an epidemic of xenophobia affecting America," Dixon said. "... For me, it is a matter of my faith that I am taught, and I believe that I am to love my neighbor, that I am to love the stranger."

Next week, the Obama administration will summon a small, bipartisan group of Congress members to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on immigration. The meeting is the first step in what President Barack Obama has said he hopes will lead to wholesale policy reform.

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