

Monday » June 2 » 2008

## Windsor mayor aims to stem tide of illegal immigrants

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NEW YORK - Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis said Monday Ottawa needs to begin a massive publicity campaign across the United States to warn illegal immigrants they should think twice about seeing Canada as a soft touch.

Speaking after telling an immigration conference in New York of the crisis Windsor suffered last fall, Francis said undocumented people need to know that heading for Canada may not be in their best long-term interest.

"It should be made clear that, yes, they may be allowed entry into Canada, and yes, there may be a delay before your case is heard, but once your case is heard, the likelihood of success is very slim," Francis said at the Center on Media, Crime and Justice at John Jay College.

"And they should also be told not to relocate your families because you may be sent back."

From last August, hundreds of mainly Mexican illegal immigrants began crossing from the United States into Windsor - many originating in Naples, Fla., where they had paid a local unscrupulous operator \$500 for an information and transportation package that would supposedly result in their receiving refugee status in Canada.

Under Canadian law, Windsor and Ontario were obliged to offer shelter and other welfare funds to the applicants while their cases made their way through a hopelessly backlogged refugee adjudication process. But around 97 per cent of such cases are rejected - and the people deported back to their home countries.

"In Naples we were reactive in terms of the federal government of Canada," Francis said of a publicity campaign the government launched in Florida to warn locals of the likely outcome unless they were bona fide refugees.

"The government at the federal level now has to be proactive in terms of communicating, and getting out ahead of the curve in other parts of the United States."

The necessity of an immediate campaign, Francis said, stems from the observation of several conference speakers that state and city authorities in the U.S. are expected to become increasingly involved in turning in illegal immigrants in the absence of comprehensive federal reform to deal with an estimated 12 million undocumented people. As the threat they will be discovered increases, people search for a way out.

"That's what triggered the Naples (exodus)," Francis said.

He acknowledged the campaign might be costly - but financing it was "better than having to provide social services and health care" to increasing amounts of people.

"We have our consulates, we have our local agencies, we have the network there to get the message across," he added of Canada's reach into the United States.

Francis also said the federal government should work to speed up the refugee application process - which can currently take up to two years to complete. Doing so would reduce the window during which applicants who are eventually unsuccessful can live in Canada.

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