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## Memphis Business Journal

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# Siskind heads up coalition to serve as advocate for immigration issues

Memphis Business Journal - March 2, 2007 by [Christopher Sheffield](#)

A group of leaders from various business associations is forming a coalition in Memphis in anticipation of a revised immigration reform bill expected to hit Congress this week.

Led by immigration attorney Greg Siskind, managing member of Siskind Susser Bland, the group will have its initial meeting March 5 to form a coalition to advocate on employment-based immigration issues, Siskind says. Representatives from chambers of commerce and industry associations who rely heavily on immigrant labor, including those in the construction, health care and hospitality industries, will attend the first meeting.

"This hits a lots of sectors," Siskind says.

It's too early to know exactly how the group will function, but its mission will largely be to lobby the West Tennessee congressional delegation and, to a lesser degree, state legislators, Siskind says.

There is a "mixed record" among the state's Congressional delegates on the immigration issue, Siskind says.

Newly elected U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-9th Dist., will "be quite good on this" issue, while U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-7th Dist., has taken stances Siskind thinks are invasive to business.

Newly elected U.S. Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., has expressed a more middle-of-the-road approach.

"From the election, Corker's attitude seemed to be heavy on enforcement, but practical on coming up with something," he says.

That, Siskind says, isn't far off what he feels is the attitude of most businesses he represents when it comes to issues of illegal immigration.

"Everybody agrees we need to enforce the law and not let people be here illegally," he says.

The goal, he says, is to have control of the borders and make everyone in the U.S. "on the radar screen and not in the shadows."

But, if the estimated 10 million-12 million people who are in the country illegally were somehow removed, Siskind says "it would bankrupt the country" because too many employers rely on the immigrant population as an employee base.

The problem is that there is no legal way for the vast number of employers to hire all of the immigrant workers they need, he says.

There are also significant problems with the H-1B Visa system for professionals, including both the number allowed each year (65,000) and how family members are excluded.

"There's just a lot of areas in immigration that clearly don't work for employers," Siskind says.

The Memphis lobbying group is a local offshoot of the Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition based in Nashville, which has been working with business, industry and political leaders on the immigration issue at the state level since 2001.

Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition director David Lubell says the group has conducted workshops and seminars for a wide range of groups to help educate people on the immigration issue.

"We're trying to make the climate more friendly to reform," Lubell says.

He, too, says its too early in the process to know how the state's congressional delegation will vote on the issue, but he thinks business clearly is looking for answers.

"From a business perspective, there's been a step-up in enforcement so it's making it harder for businesses to find workers," he says. "Most businesses don't want to exploit the system. They have had hard working employees who have been trained and they want to do what they can to keep them."

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