

# Opposing groups face off over immigration sweep Raid at Republic Waste sparks a peaceful war of words outside detention center

By ANNE MARIE KILDAY  
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Disagreeing demonstrators dueled Saturday afternoon in a noisy but peaceful protest outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in north Houston.

The two groups had opposing views on last week's ICE raid at Republic Waste Services, where more than 48 employees were detained and questioned about their immigration status.

Representatives of the Coalition in Defense of the Community, which comprises Latino and other activist groups, held protest signs and chanted "no more raids!" One sign read, "We are workers. Not Terrorists, Not Criminals."

Representatives of U.S. Border Watch and the Houston chapter of the Minutemen stood across a driveway with their own signs. "Remember the Alamo!" they countered. They waved large American flags, a couple of flags based on the 1835 Battle of Gonzales bearing a cannon and the words "Come and take it!" and a variety of signs, including the word "Amnesty" surrounded by a circle and a line drawn through it.

About 10 Houston police officers kept the protest peaceful as about 40 people on each side swapped opinions and taunts.

Maria Jimenez, vice president of the coalition, called for a national "moratorium" on raids by ICE because President Bush has called for immigration reform.

"Our coalition basically believes there shouldn't be any more raids. The president has the power to order a stop to the raids, until there is a solution reached on the immigration reforms," Jimenez said. "When there is a war, a truce is called and people sit down and negotiate. Otherwise, the president is basically saying one thing and doing another."

Curtis Collier, of U.S. Border Watch, said his group was outside the ICE detention center to show support for all law enforcement officers, including the U.S. Border Patrol and the Houston Police Department.

"We want to protect our nation," Collier said.

Collier said he supports immigration reform but not the proposals supported by Bush.

"That's not immigration reform; that's expanding what we already have today, which is an open-border policy. What we need to do is close the borders of this nation, get the people who are in this country illegally out of this country and enforce the employment laws that are on the books," Collier said.

"Making it legal for people who have broken the law to come here is not going to do anybody any good. In fact, it will lead to the failure of this nation."

Church Ratliff, of the Houston chapter of the Minutemen, said, "The opposing group thinks they should protest ICE for doing their job."

"We are absolutely not opposed to legal immigration," he said. "We are absolutely opposed to illegal immigration."