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## **DeMint, Inglis seek public's input on immigration reform**

**By JASON SPENCER, Staff Writer**

Amnesty. It's the one word responsible for perhaps the most division on the controversial immigration reform that is working its way through Washington.

Today, two Republican legislators will be in town to soak up what Spartanburg voters have to say on the matter. U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint will hold a Dutch-treat lunch at Wade's at noon, and U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis will host a town hall meeting at 7 p.m. at Pine Street Elementary School.

On immigration, DeMint has his mind made up. Inglis does not.

DeMint's stop is part of a statewide "listening tour," and the senator hopes to hear about a variety of issues - though with the amount of contention even among rank-and-file Republicans on immigration, the issue is sure to come up, if not dominate the conversation.

DeMint opposes the current immigration bill, which he calls amnesty. He already has filed several amendments to it - including one late last week banning felons, sex offenders, gang members and members of terrorist organizations from acquiring legal immigration status.

Inglis wants to focus exclusively on immigration tonight. Typically in such gatherings, the congressman lets the topic run its course then opens the floor to any other issue people want addressed.

Inglis has hosted several informational meetings on immigration in the past, but he has been quiet so far on the current debate in Washington. He stated in an e-mail to the Herald-Journal that he'd like to wait for the bill to work its way through the Senate - where it's likely to change - before making a judgment.

"As it stands now, the bill does some things I like. It tightens the border, requires employers to verify Social Security numbers, creates a temporary worker program and enhances legal immigration," Inglis stated. "The bill also redeems the rule of law by visiting consequences - fines, long waits in line - for those who have come here illegally. Let's see what it looks like when it comes to the House."

Most agree immigration is a problem in America - an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants are in the country - and most are ready for the government to do something, said Chip Felkel, a Republican strategist in Greenville not affiliated with any campaign.

When it comes to re-election, the immigration issue "could cause you some headaches," Felkel said.

But it's wise of the congressmen to give their constituents a chance to be heard.

"In this case, this is one of those issues that has the potential to create some fissures within the party," Felkel said.

"There's a lot of demagoguery going on within the party right now. But at the end of the day, what people want is the problem of immigration fixed in a manner that affects them on a day-to-day basis the least.

What they might hear from their constituents is, 'If you don't agree, what's your solution?' "

GOP presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, won praise at the recent state Republican Party Convention for calling the current immigration bill amnesty. DeMint is the top elected official supporting Romney in South Carolina.

But others, like Arizona Sen. John McCain, who is co-sponsoring the bill, say it is not amnesty, because it involves a level of punishment - fines, for instance, and waiting periods.

Spartanburg County Republican Party Chairman Rick Beltram said he personally does not consider the bill amnesty, but that like-minded elected officials are going to have to do a better job communicating that with the voting public.

"Most of the people have thought this bill is all about amnesty," Beltram said. "People are having a tough time understanding between amnesty, guest workers, paying a fine - it's all thrown in one bucket. I don't think people have studied the bill detail for detail, because they've heard the word amnesty, and get all emotional."

Beltram said he hasn't read the 1,000-page immigration reform bill, and he hasn't found anyone else who has, either.

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