



## Illegal immigration could shake up Lewisville council races

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LEWISVILLE – Elected leaders in Lewisville take pride in their city's political peace and quiet. City Council meetings rarely draw crowds; recent elections haven't either.

If one issue could stir this politically sleepy suburb, it could be illegal immigration. City leaders have taken an intentionally subtle approach compared with the high-profile campaigns in Farmers Branch and Irving.

But the May 10 council race is amplifying the volume. Candidates report growing frustration from residents. Council candidate John Gorena – a veteran of high-profile immigration rallies in Farmers Branch and Irving – has campaigned vehemently for Lewisville to take a tougher stand against illegal immigrants.

"If we don't have the courage to take action, we're going to end up like they are – in a world of hurt," said Mr. Gorena, who is Hispanic.

Mr. Gorena's heavy-handed approach is somewhat foreign to Lewisville politics. His pitch: Strong tactics would improve schools and lower health-care costs.

His opponent, Place 1 incumbent Greg Tierney, and other city officials said they're doing all they can. They blame the state and federal governments.

"People are frustrated," Mr. Tierney said. "I get that on a daily basis. I hear it. But our hands are tied in many ways. It's really a federal and state issue."

But Mr. Gorena said the city could do more. Among his plans: Demand identification from day laborers. If they're undocumented, arrest them.

Lewisville officials have said police can't arrest day laborers on private property if the landowners don't complain. The city has used undercover officers who cite day laborers who solicit for work in public streets. Mr. Gorena said it shouldn't matter.

"You enforce the law or you don't," he said.

His campaign could leave an imprint even if he's not elected. Incumbent council members – including Mr. Tierney – have endorsed Mr. Gorena's call to adopt English as the city's official language and to eliminate most Spanish translation services.

"English is the language of opportunity in this country," Place 3 incumbent council member Lathan

Watts said. "You do a disservice to people when you accommodate their lack of understanding of English."

Mr. Watts, a political manager for a trade association, won a special election to fill the remaining year of an unexpired term. At the time, he campaigned against the City Council's support for a day laborer center.

Mr. Tierney was among those who voted for a city-funded center but now calls it unworkable. The council has since pulled funding, in effect, reversing its position.

"The problem is we can't spend taxpayer money to support people here illegally," Mr. Tierney said. "There's no feasible way to make sure we're servicing only legal."

Mr. Tierney's one-time support for the center helped lure Mr. Gorena into the race. And Mr. Watts' opposition led structural engineer David Fogle to run against him.

"[We need] to move them off the highway," Mr. Fogle said of day laborers at Huffines Plaza along Interstate 35E and at a 7-Eleven on Business Highway 121. "It's a pretty big problem. I know we have police who monitor it, but they seem to rush in the street for cars."

Mr. Gorena, who runs a computer services business, also wants the city to establish programs to verify the immigration status of all employees working for city contractors.

"Illegal immigration is not a race issue," he said. "It's legal vs.illegal. We can make it tougher for illegal aliens to live in Lewisville, and this will improve our schools."

None of the candidates supports an ordinance similar to the one in Farmers Branch that would crack down on landlords renting to illegal immigrants – at least not until Farmers Branch resolves costly litigation tied to its law.

"Farmers Branch has completely divided their city and created a mini civil war that's costing their taxpayers," said Mr. Tierney, a restaurant owner. "There's a good example of a city that tried to do something, but their hands are tied."

Lewisville has taken a more subtle approach. One step not requiring council approval: Police now check the immigration status of all arrestees. Police Chief Russell Kerbow said that has led to 20 to 25 deferrals a month to the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"It hasn't generated a lot of controversy, which keeps us under the radar, which helps us be successful," Mr. Watts said.