

Immigration activists depart Dodger Stadium for Bakersfield march

August 14, 2013 | By Kate Linthicum | *This post has been corrected. See note below for details.*

A caravan of protesters departed Los Angeles Wednesday morning, bound for a march in Bakersfield that organizers are billing as one of the largest protests in the nation in support of an immigration overhaul.

The march, which is expected to draw thousands of activists from across the state, was organized by a coalition of labor, religious and immigrant rights groups that support a bipartisan Senate bill that would grant a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million people estimated to be living in the United States illegally.



Maria Ortiz, who works as a janitor, shouts slogans at an immigration rally... (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles...)

At least two groups that oppose an amnesty bill have planned counter-protests.

Labor groups that support the bill gathered at Dodger Stadium for a 6 a.m. rally before getting in their cars.

Eliseo Medina, secretary-treasurer of the Service Employees International Union, said protesters wanted to send a message to House Republicans, who have said they will not vote on the Senate immigration bill.

"If they want us to vote for them, they've got to vote for us first," Medina said. "The time for immigration reform is now."

One protester, 47-year-old janitor Maria Ortiz, said she had not slept in 24 hours and came to the rally after getting off her second shift of work. She was marching around the parking lot with several dozen protesters, holding a sign shaped like a butterfly. Butterflies, she said, are symbols of migration.

"We came to work, we came to make a better life for our families," said Ortiz, who crossed the border illegally from Mexico 23 years ago. "We should have a chance to be citizens here."

After the two-hour ride to Bakersfield, protesters plan to march to the office of Rep. Kevin McCarthy, the third-most powerful Republican in the House.

GOP leaders have said that instead of bringing a Senate bill to a vote, they will consider a series of small-scale immigration bills instead.

Organizers of the march say McCarthy has the ability to persuade House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) to take up comprehensive immigration legislation.

But McCarthy appears unlikely to be persuaded. On his website, McCarthy writes that the U.S. “should not provide any amnesty that would benefit those who defy our laws and enter the United States illegally.”

He also advocates for increasing border security and taking steps to ensure that immigrants here without permission do not have access to social benefits reserved for American citizens.

Link to news report: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsb065lIL-0&noredirect=1>