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Group unveils immigration ads

Welcoming initiative hopes to change ideas on race and immigration in Idaho with ads and discussions.

By Bethann Stewart - bstewart@idahostatesman.com

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A coalition of state and local organizations and community members launched a public awareness campaign Tuesday to change the climate of fear they say surrounds Idaho newcomers — especially immigrants.

"The current climate around race and immigration does not reflect our values," said Antonina Robles, a member of the Idaho Community Action Network.

The Welcoming Idaho Initiative will place one of two messages, chosen by a committee, on Treasure Valley bus benches.

The messages read:

- "Immigration is an American experience. Acceptance is an American value."

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- "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," a statement taken from the 25th chapter of the book of Matthew in the Bible.

The initiative will include community discussions across Idaho, according to Amy Herzfeld, executive director of the Idaho Human Rights Education Center in Boise.

The coalition has raised enough money for 10 bus-bench ads that will be placed around Boise and a billboard ad that will be placed in the Magic Valley between Jerome and Burley, Herzfeld said.

The first two ads were placed Tuesday on the bus benches on Capital Boulevard in front of the Boise Public Library.

The Rev. Thomas Faucher of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Boise was among the supporters of the campaign.

"Jesus said our responsibility is to establish relationships with those around us and to care for them," he said. "The highest of human values is hospitality."

Wilder Mayor John Bechtel also supports the initiative. He said 70 percent of Wilder's population is Hispanic.

Bechtel recounted the story of his son, who married a woman in the Philippines. The couple has a child and has had a very difficult time returning to the United States as a family.

He said he was not an advocate of illegal immigration but appreciated the frustration of those who want to come to America.

"I understand why people climb fences and swim rivers," Bechtel said. "Because they may never get here. The (immigration) system is broken."

The Welcoming Idaho Initiative was modeled after similar successful campaigns in



Provided by Idaho community action network
Glenn Lexa stands in front of a bus-bench ad supported by the Welcoming Idaho Initiative on Capitol Boulevard in front of the Boise Public Library.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Welcoming Idaho Initiative

Make a donation to the Idaho Community Action Network, 3450 Hill Road, Boise 83703, and note that it's for the Welcoming Idaho Initiative. For more information, call 208-385-9146.

other states, Herzfeld said.

"I don't want my friends, my family, my neighbors to be afraid to go to Wal-Mart," Robles said.

Bethann Stewart: 377-6393

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It is NOT about race, it is Not about nationality, it is NOT about immigration. It IS about criminal activity, it IS about people not entitled seeking relief. I support immigration fully. This country was founded on immigration. I am completely against illegal immigration.

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