

Yahoo! My Yahoo! Mail

Search  
the Web \_\_\_\_\_**YAHOO!** NEWS Sign In  
New User? Sign Up

Ne

Home U.S. Business World Entertainment Sports Tech Politics Science Health Travel Most Popular  
Local News Education Religion Politics Crimes and Trials

Search:

All News &amp; Blogs

Search

Advanced

## Pa. city poised for immigration crackdown

**AP**

AP Photo: Jose Lechuga, 42, is interviewed in his store in Hazleton, Pa., Thursday, June 15, 2006.

Slideshow: [Immigration Reform Debate](#)

### ELSEWHERE ON THE WEB

**CNN.COM**  
Dry winds hinder Arizona firefighters

**ABC NEWS**  
ABC NEWS EXCLUSIVE:  
Durham Republicans to Challenge District Attorney Over Duke Case

**USATODAY.COM**  
New Orleans sees its worst violence since before Katrina

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM, Associated Press Writer

34 minutes ago

HAZLETON, Pa. - With tensions rising and the police department and municipal government stretched thin, Hazleton is about to embark on one of the toughest crackdowns on illegal immigrants anywhere in the United States.

Last week the mayor of this former coal town introduced, and the City Council tentatively approved, a measure that would revoke the business licenses of companies that employ illegal immigrants; impose \$1,000 fines on landlords who rent to illegal immigrants; and make English the official language of the city.

"Illegal immigrants are destroying the city," said Mayor Lou Barletta, a Republican. "I don't want them here, period."

Barletta said he had no choice but to act after two illegal immigrants from the Dominican Republic were charged last month with shooting and killing a 29-year-old woman. Other recent incidents involving illegal immigrants have rattled this city 80 miles northwest of Philadelphia, including the arrest of a 14-year-old boy for firing a gun at a playground.

"This is crazy," the mayor said. "People are afraid to walk the streets. There's no order and no order back in Hazleton, and I'm going to use every tool I possibly can."

The City Council, which approved the measure in a 4-1 vote, must vote on it twice before it can become law. The next vote is scheduled for mid-July.

When Barletta took office in 2000, Hispanics represented about 5 percent of the population of 23,000. The population has since shot up to 31,000, with Hispanics representing 30 percent, lured to Hazleton by cheap housing, a lower cost of living and nearby plants, factories and farms.

City officials do not know how many of the new arrivals are in the United States, but they say they are fueling the drug trade, joining gangs and committing other crimes.

ADVERTISEMENT

**KEVIN SITES IN THE HOT ZONE****On the brink**  
Tension rises in Sri Lanka

Lanka amid renewed violence.



Municipal officials around the nation, frustrated at what they perceive as the federal government's inability to stem illegal immigration, have increasingly taken matters into their own hands.

In San Bernardino, Calif., voters will decide whether to adopt a measure nearly identical to one in Hazleton. An Idaho county filed a racketeering lawsuit against agricultural contractors accused of hiring illegal immigrants. In New Hampshire, a pair of police chiefs blame illegal immigrants for trespassing.

"They're being forced to pick up the financial tab for all of this nonsense, and the whatever they can to find ways to combat it at the local level," said Susan Tully, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which advocates limiting immigration. "This is a fine example of what I'm talking about."

Flavia Jimenez, an immigrant policy analyst at the National Council of La Raza, says the Hazleton crackdown would prompt a civil rights lawsuit.

"Landlords are going to shut their doors to anyone who may look or sound Latino. On the other hand, landlords may attempt to actually determine whether a person is undocumented or not, and make multiple mistakes because of the complexity of law."

Whites in Hazleton seem to overwhelmingly favor the proposed crackdown. Barletta has been flooded with hundreds of approving e-mails and phone calls — from as far as California and Florida — and he got a standing ovation when he walked into a restaurant for lunch.

"It's about time," said Francis X. Tucci, 57, who was born and raised in Hazleton and runs a hair salon in the heart of the Hispanic business district. "We were a nice community once, but everywhere, I understand that, but we're talking about here and now."

Some Hispanics approve of the measure, saying they are fed up with crime and corruption. "As mayor, I wouldn't let anyone in who had a criminal record," said Rafael Rovi, a naturalized American citizen from the Dominican Republic.

Others view the proposal as unnecessary, saying that most illegal immigrants are hardworking and only want to work. They point to the success of Wyoming Street, a colorful thoroughfare where dozens of businesses have opened in the past few years.

Jose Lechuga, 42, came to the United States illegally in 1982, received amnesty and now operates a grocery store and restaurant in Hazleton. He said the mayor is "treating illegal people with criminals."

—

On the Net:

Open letter from Barletta: <http://www.hazletoncity.org>

FAIR: <http://www.fairus.org>

National Council of La Raza: <http://www.nclr.org>