

## Both sides of the fence

Minutemen, GVPJ meet, debate immigration

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Sharon Sullivan  
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Some western Colorado Minutemen are building a fence along Arizona's border with Mexico to keep illegal immigrants out.

A few Grand Valley Peace and Justice members traveled to another border town recently to protest such a barrier.

Last Thursday the two groups amicably came together to present their contrasting views on the immigration issue in a public forum held at City Hall.

Approximately 100 people showed up to the city hall auditorium to listen to local Minuteman Dana Isham and Grand Valley Peace and Justice director Karen Sjoberg address four aspects of the immigration issue: security, rule of law, economics and solutions. Sjoberg was filling in for Mark Harris who had become ill the day before.

She read from a prepared text by Harris. Tom Acker joined Sjoberg for the question and answer period.

The Minuteman Project is a citizen's vigilance operation monitoring immigration, business and government.

Grand Valley Peace and Justice is a Catholic faith-based organization that advocates for the poor and disadvantaged in society. The two groups see things differently when it comes to illegal immigration.

Isham said Minutemen believe "border security is national security," and want to see the border closed.

"We need an Israeli-style fence that keeps out Palestinian terrorists, as well as the mom and pop immigrant, and terrorists," Isham said. He fears if families with children can slip in, so can terrorists.

Sjoberg said the southern border has not provided access to Middle Eastern terrorists however.

"More resources should be spent on finding terrorists, and less on apprehending job seekers," she said.

Sjoberg said the U.S. labor market is creating a high demand for that unskilled labor force, and

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Karen Sjoberg, of Grand Valley Peace and Justice, Mesa State College history professor Steve Schulte serving as moderator, and Dana Isham of the Rocky Mountain Minutemen hosted a forum on immigration Thursday.



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Sharon  
Sullivan/Free Press

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that the U.S. is giving a mixed message. Posting a “Keep out” sign on one hand and a “Help wanted” sign on the other. And its not only decreasing wages that causes a lack of native employees, she said. Even construction companies paying higher than minimum wage often cannot find enough workers.

GVPI would like to see comprehensive immigration reform that would include providing a pathway for undocumented workers to become citizens through an earned legalization program.

Isham is against what he calls amnesty.

He said there are two solutions to illegal immigration: Close the border and enforce laws that are already in place. He said Minutemen don’t believe the law should be circumvented just because someone is poor or has suffered injustices.

Oil field workers Bob Brewer and Doug Stewart were among those who attended the forum.

Brewer said Spanish speakers — he doesn’t know whether they’re legal or illegal immigrants — compete for the jobs in the oil industry.

“I’m just here to listen to the debate,” Stewart said.

Matt Bynum said he didn’t know much about the issue, and came to see what both sides had to say.

Korie Conley supports the idea of comprehensive immigration reform as advocated by Grand Valley Peace and Justice.

“I thought this was a really cool thing to have two groups of people who feel strongly about this issue and be in a situation where they have to be civil and listen to each other’s ideas,” Conley said.

Someone from the audience asked if the Catholic Church, as a tax-exempt organization should be getting involved with politics?

“Four hundred people die every year (crossing the border),” Sjoberg said. “When it concerns people it becomes a moral issue. It’s important for a church to stand up for issues that affect human beings.”

“We can do more than build a wall. We can address the root causes of immigration, provide a path to citizenship, create a temporary workers’ program with protections for both immigrant and native workers. Nothing less than comprehensive immigration reform will fix these problems,” Sjoberg said.

## **Groups debate immigration issues**

The Daily Sentinel  
MIKE SACCONI  
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Illegal immigration is undoubtedly a divisive issue.

And at a Thursday night forum on the issue, hosted by the Rocky Mountain Minutemen and Grand Valley Peace and Justice, that division was manifest.

Following a brief intermission, the intermixed crowd of nearly 100 minutemen, immigrant rights supporters and other community members had separated to each side of the Grand Junction City Hall auditorium.

As each side, represented by Rocky Mountain Minutemen leader Dana Isham and Grand Valley Peace and Justice director Karen Sjoberg, addressed questions about a wall along the Mexican border, the human cost of illegal immigration and other issues, the nods and harrumphs flopped sides as each groups' representatives spoke.

Tom Acker, coordinator of Western Colorado Justice for Immigrants, who joined Sjoberg halfway through the forum, drew the loudest midsentence criticism when he tried to explain the "myth" that Hispanic immigrants do not want to integrate.

"The problem right now that Grand Junction is suffering from is that there are not sufficient educational opportunities for people desiring to learn English," Acker said.

Acker said the majority of Hispanic immigrants learn English within a decade of coming to the United States.

Isham also drew muted displeasure from the crowd when he said he could not respond to the thought that some members of the community think the actions of minutemen movements in Colorado were giving rise to racial tensions.

"As far as race in the debate," Isham said, "when someone brings up race, my feeling is that they can't defend their position. If there are strained racial tensions, I don't see where they are."

Following the two hours of discussion in which each side stressed its own preferences for equitable solutions — Isham touted a security-first approach, and Sjoberg encouraged a guest worker program with a path to citizenship — both sides said they thought the forum went well, but worried that it had little effect.

Isham said he was pleased with the staid tone of the debate, which never strayed into a shouting match or obscenity.

He said, however, other than pushing their sides of the issue, he was not sure many people — no more than "a small percentage" — walked away with changed minds.

Sjoberg said she thought she made more convincing arguments than Isham, but she said she did not think they swayed the minds of many of those who attended the forum.

"I know we didn't change people's minds on the (two) sides," Sjoberg said.

Nonetheless, she said she hoped the handful of people who came to truly listen walked away with a better understanding of the illegal immigration issue.