

# GloucesterTimes.com, Gloucester, MA

July 18, 2014

## Tierney draws fire amid immigration crisis

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**Statehouse Reporter**

---- — BOSTON — The surge of immigrant children from Central America could become a prickly issue for Democratic Rep. John Tierney as he fights for re-election, with challengers from both parties calling him out for not doing enough to stem the tide of refugees.

Republican Richard Tisei argues that Tierney has ignored the problem in Lynn, where officials have been overwhelmed by waves of unaccompanied minors, most from Guatemala, who cross the U.S.-Mexican border illegally before settling on the North Shore.

“Lynn taxpayers should not be expected to shoulder costs related to the influx of unaccompanied minors,” Tisei, making his second run for the seat now held by Tierney, said in a prepared statement. “Our congressman should be fighting to bring financial relief to Lynn and to stop the flood of new arrivals at the border.”

More than 45,000 children traveling alone from Central America have been detained at the U.S. border with Mexico, according to the Customs and Border Protection agency, which predicts the number could swell to 90,000 by year’s end. Some are teenagers, though others are younger.

They are fleeing gangs and violence, according to federal authorities, but come seeking education and are drawn by rumors that once they arrive in the United States they will be allowed to stay.

Tisei called on Tierney to support legislation, filed by U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican, and Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Democrat, both from Texas, that would allow the U.S. Border Patrol to quickly turn back many kids at the border. Under current law, underage immigrants are allowed to stay in the country while awaiting a hearing in the backlogged immigration court system.

“Washington’s failed policies have created a humanitarian crisis that puts a tremendous strain on our communities,” Tisei said.

Tierney defends his record on immigration and said he is pushing for money and resources for Lynn and other communities that have been absorbing immigrant children. He accused his Republican challenger of “politicizing” a humanitarian crisis.

“He’s out there giving his bullet points on the campaign trail, but he really doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” Tierney said Thursday from Washington. “The reality is that his party is the problem. They just want to turn people away at the border while ignoring the fact that many of these kids are already here.”

Tierney, however, also faced criticism Thursday from at least one other Democrat in the hotly contested race.

Marisa DeFranco, an immigration attorney and one of four Democrats challenging Tierney in the Sept. 9 primary, ripped the congressman for inaction.

“He’s been nowhere on this issue,” said DeFranco, of Middleton, who regularly represents immigrants and asylum seekers in federal court. “I haven’t seen any ideas or significant proposals coming out of his office.”

DeFranco blames President Barack Obama for signing an executive order in June that gave temporary amnesty to about 1.7 million undocumented children, which allowed them to stay until their cases are heard in immigration courts.

“When he signed that, it sent a signal to everybody to, ‘Send your kids here, they’re going to be legal,’” she said.

This week, Obama asked Congress for \$3.7 billion in emergency funds to address the situation at the border. Tierney said he and other Democrats are seeking money for host communities as part of that appropriations bill, though Republicans in the House of Representatives are pushing to significantly pare down the request.

On Wednesday, Gov. Deval Patrick said he is weighing a request from the Obama administration to temporarily shelter some of the unaccompanied children crossing into the United States in Massachusetts. Federal authorities have already opened a number of new facilities for the youth throughout the country.

Patrick called the situation at the southern border a “humanitarian crisis” and compared it to the story of the MS St. Louis, a boat packed with nearly 900 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. The St. Louis was turned away from the U.S., Cuba and Canada in 1939 and eventually had to return to Europe with its passengers, approximately one quarter of whom later died in Nazi death camps.

Patrick told reporters that Massachusetts should “do what it can” to provide shelter for the immigrant youth.

DeFranco said she doesn’t believe the children should be brought to this state, even temporarily.

“If you start dispersing them across the country, they are going to disappear into the wind like so many do,” she said. “They’re not going to show up for immigration court hearings. And, if you allow all these children to stay, it will hurt thousands of more children whose parents are going to be encouraged by human traffickers to send them.”

Tisei said he also thinks the move is a bad idea.

“I’m not sure the state has the capacity to deal with that,” he said. “The federal government should be helping communities like Lynn where the kids are already here, before we start opening our doors to another influx.”

Tierney said he supports the move but wants to make sure Massachusetts has the resources so that immigrants housed here “don’t become a burden on the host communities” and are processed quickly.

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