

Important Faces in the AIM Crowd

Washington Post Staff Writers
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Action in Montgomery, a coalition of religious congregations considered by some to be the county's most powerful grass-roots organization, announced its 2006 agenda at a rousing meeting at Woodside United Methodist Church in Silver Spring last week, and the politicians turned out to hear it.

The event drew 708 religious leaders and congregants.

It also attracted an impressive number of candidates running for office this year. As well it should, as the group has recruited 174 campaign workers who are each expected to brief 20 county residents on major campaign issues such as affordable housing and immigration. AIM organizers expect to have 220 campaign workers by May.

In the audience were the two Democratic candidates for Montgomery County executive, 19 candidates for County Council and Lt. Gov. **Michael S. Steele**, a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate.

Steele joined U.S. Rep. **Chris Van Hollen** (D) to announce their effort to open a full-service immigration center in Montgomery County, a goal on AIM's agenda. Van Hollen said he would seek a \$3 million federal appropriation for the center. Steele said he would send letters in support of it to several members of Congress.

"Tonight, I want to reaffirm my commitment to see this to the end," Steele said to cheers.

The other candidates were each given 45 seconds to introduce themselves to the audience but didn't get a chance to say much. Even County Council member **Steven A. Silverman** (D-At Large) and former council member **Isiah Leggett**, both seeking the Democratic nomination for county executive, had to rush through their remarks.

Indeed, the night belonged to AIM, as organizers presented their agenda.

On the housing front, they said they would urge construction of 1,000 affordable and workforce housing units on public land by 2009. They promised to push for each high school to have one counselor dedicated to helping students get into college. They would also seek scholarship aid for any student who graduates from high school with at least a C+ average and a 90 percent attendance rate.

"It's a true grass-roots agenda," said **Russ Louch**, AIM's co-chairman. "We're tired of the politics of pollsters and lobbyists. . . We will not allow politics to continue as it has in the past."