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**McCain Plans a Visit To Rally For Immigration Reform Plan**

**By DANIELA GERSON, Staff Reporter of the Sun**

**A Republican senator is coming to New York to rally support for an immigration reform plan that is winning many fans in immigrant circles. He'll likely arrive before New York's Democratic senators even take a public stance on the divisive issue.**

**Senator McCain, a Republican of Arizona who will likely run for president in 2008, will headline a town hall meeting and rally for immigration reform expected to attract 1,000 people to Lower Manhattan on February 27. The evening will be an opportunity for him to push the bipartisan bill he is sponsoring with Senator Kennedy, a Democrat of Massachusetts.**

**He likely will not have to push very hard: Of the four immigration reform plans in the Senate, it is by far the most popular with immigrant organizers, lawyers, and union leaders in the city. Key to its favorable reception is its inclusion of a legalization plan for the nation's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants, as well as a new guest worker program.**

**More than a dozen local immigration groups, as well as the New York branch of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the Archdiocese of New York, and various unions are sponsoring the town hall meeting. In addition, key Democratic congressmen from New York are expected to attend, including Rep. Charles Rangel.**

**New York immigrant leaders expressed frustration that their own senators will not be standing with Mr. Mc-Cain and pushing for a path to legal status for the city's estimated 525,000 illegal immigrants, more rapid family reunification, and new legal channels for immigrants to work in America.**

**"We will know what Senator Mc-Cain thinks about this issue, but we continue to be in the dark about what our own two senators think should be done," said Chung-Wha Hong, the executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition, one of the groups sponsoring the event. "More and more immigrants are asking why they aren't taking a stance on this issue and fighting for reform."**

**In the past few weeks there has been an increase in organizing efforts pertaining to immigration re form and criticism of Senators Clinton and**

Schumer for their absence from the debate. Earlier this month, hundreds of Irish immigrants congregated in Yonkers to organize a campaign to promote the passage of the McCain-Kennedy bill. Taking a different approach, dozens of immigrants from Queens on Tuesday rallied in front of Mr. Schumer's Midtown office, asking him to support legalization and to take a stance against a bill that passed in the House that would turn illegal immigrants into criminals. They then marched to Mrs. Clinton's office.

"They really have a responsibility to their constituency in New York to play a leadership role in the Senate," the director of Desis Rising Up and Moving, Monami Maulik, said of New York's senators. The group has invited the senators to their own town hall-style meeting on immigration in Queens, but Ms. Maulik said they have received no response. "I think many immigrant communities have been disappointed that they are not publicly saying anything," she said.

In response to the protest, a spokeswoman for Mr. Schumer, Risa Heller, touted his record, saying, "Senator Schumer has long been a supporter of fair and rational immigration policy." She said he "will fight for legislation that both improves security and treats immigrants fairly." Mrs. Clinton's office did not respond to requests for comment.

The Senate next month will take up what is expected to be a highly contentious debate about how to solve the problems of immigration in America. Some observers are saying Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Schumer are biding their time to see which bill reaches the next level, a politically savvy move considering that the McCain-Kennedy provisions may not be included in the final bill.

"With immigration such a divisive issue in the country now, the New York senators might not see it in their political interests to take a stance on an issue that they may not get anything concrete to show for later," a visiting scholar at the Migration Policy Institute, Marc Rosenblum, said. "Unless they're going to come out and lead on it, it makes sense to follow."