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# Minuteman leaders say their organization wrongly portrayed

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — National leaders of a group opposed to illegal immigration were in Kansas City on Monday to answer criticism they believe is wrongly portraying the group.

Officers of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, which patrols the border and reports illegal immigrants to authorities, also announced they will be bringing their regional leadership conference to Kansas City in February instead of December as originally planned. They said they were having problems finding a place to book their convention in December because of the holidays.

President and founder Chris Simcox and others from the Arizona-based organization met with the Kansas City police chief and local media Monday, hoping to clear up what they say has been misinformation about their organization and its intent. He said Minuteman members serve as watchdogs on the lookout for illegal activity.

Members of the Minuteman group, which has a Kansas City area chapter, say they are not vigilantes. They say they're concerned citizens who report illegal immigration activity to police and other authorities.

"We're an organization that does not take the law into its own hands," Simcox said. "We're there to support law enforcement, to observe and report."

Last month, the group announced it would hold a meeting in Kansas City after one of its local members found herself at the center of controversy over her appointment to the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Board this summer.

"Kansas City is a perfect spot within the center of the nation," Simcox said Monday. "Geographically, it will accommodate our needs to hold a Midwestern retreat. And certainly it's in support of Frances (Semler) in standing by her principles."

Semler's appointment has drawn sharp criticism from the National Council of La Raza, the nation's largest Hispanic advocacy group, as well as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Both organizations have threatened to cancel conventions scheduled for Kansas City.

Joe Miller, a spokesman for Mayor Mark Funkhouser, said Monday that the mayor is working with NCLR and the NAACP to reach an agreement so they will still have their conventions in Kansas City. Funkhouser has said he will not ask Semler to resign.

NCLR spokeswoman Lisa Navarrete said the group is talking to the mayor's office and Hispanic community leaders in Kansas City about "some options that might address the concerns of all the parties involved."

Semler said she can't believe her involvement in the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps has generated so much attention.

"I've heard that I'm a racist and a bigot, and that's absolutely false," Semler said.

Ed Hayes, director of the Minuteman chapter in the Kansas City area, said he expects at least 500 people at the group's regional leadership conference Feb. 1-2. The conference will include workshops on how members can work with law enforcement, group officials said.

Kansas City police Capt. Rich Lockhart said the Minuteman group initiated the meeting with Police Chief James Corwin. Lockhart said it's not uncommon for groups that are having events in the city to talk to police beforehand.

"They were wanting to discuss their convention and other issues they have concerns about as it relates to immigration," he said.

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