

President Trump should insist on E-Verify

The easy way to determine who is in this country illegally

The Trump administration essentially declared defeat in Minnesota last week and announced that it would withdraw pretty much all the federal agents who had been part of the immigration enforcement surge over the past few months. Whatever you think of that, and what has been going on in Minneapolis, it seems like a predictable conclusion to a story whose trajectory was set once protesters were killed.

In retrospect, there may have been a better path that would have minimized conflict and violence, a path that would have deputized employers in the effort to preclude illegal immigration, and a path that would have almost certainly resulted in a greater number of self-deportations.

That path, of course, is the national adoption of E-Verify.

E-Verify is a web-based system that allows enrolled employers to verify their employees' eligibility to work in the United States. The program is simple and effective at ensuring that jobs go to legal workers. It is a complete mystery why E-Verify, which is simple and cheap, isn't an absolute requirement for employers.

Immigration experts are quick to point out that nationwide adoption of E-Verify would increase prices, especially with respect to restaurants, hotels, builders, etc. They are probably right. Legal workers will require higher salaries. Businesses that employ people in the country illegally do it specifically to suppress the wages of all their workers, legal and illegal.

Moreover, as a practical matter, there is little difference between arresting illegal workers and preventing those in the country illegally from working in the first place. If you are serious about immigration reform, one predictable consequence will be higher wages for workers and higher prices for consumers.

The sad and usually unmentioned truth of illegal immigration is that many employers are happy to violate the law and employ illegal immigrants because they can pay illegal immigrants less, and those workers make no trouble in the workplace. If we really want to address illegal immigration, then we need to require E-Verify, and we need to increase the penalties we impose on those who employ illegal immigrants.

The voters seem to agree. A survey of 1,037 likely voters (conducted July 14-15) sponsored by the Protecting America Initiative found that 64% of Americans believe companies

should use and the government should require E-Verify to determine employment eligibility and prevent illegal immigrants from taking jobs that otherwise would go to Americans.

President Trump promised during his campaign that, if elected, he would finish the job he had started

in the first term — namely, he would fix America's broken immigration system and stop the slow-motion invasion of the United States. The good news is that he has been better than his word in securing the border.

The bad news is that perhaps as many as 20 million illegal immigrants are still living in the United States. Deporting that many people, even if we all decided it would be desirable, would be extraordinarily difficult. Mr. Trump is doing what he can, enforcing our immigration laws and deporting illegal aliens when circumstances allow.

The administration needs to take the next logical step and mandate E-Verify nationally. Although that won't solve every problem, it would redirect enforcement toward the weak spot in the system: those who employ illegal workers. Those businesses will either become deputies in the enforcement of immigration laws or, more ominously, make it clear that they are part of the problem and choose to either abet or ignore criminality.

If you are serious about reducing illegal immigration, then you have to get serious about reducing the incentives to break the law. That includes the incentives for illegal immigrants and those who hire them. Our border security challenge would be greatly simplified if we arrested business owners and executives who are complicit in illegal immigration.

If you want to encourage self-deportation, if you want to create pressure to reform the immigration system, if you want American businesses to help ensure that the laws are followed, and if you want to reward hard work and achievement, then you need to be in favor of E-Verify.

Or, we can keep doing what we did and getting what we got in Minneapolis. The choice seems obvious.

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