

Rep. Combs' E-Verify Bill Needed to Protect Jobs

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House Bill 184, sponsored by state Rep. Courtney Combs, R-Hamilton, is a step in the right direction, and will allow Ohio to join the growing number of other states that have protected their citizens and legal immigrants from the unfair competition of cheap illegal labor.

Although the E-Verify system is not a panacea, it is an inexpensive (\$100 or less), efficient (15 seconds or less), and reliable (96 percent without errors) Web-based way to ensure that Ohio jobs are filled by Ohioans and those lawfully present here.

Here are the problems. Some businesses adopt a superficial approach to hiring by accepting any document, no matter how dubious it appears, to comply with the weak federal I-9 form.

Moreover, many individuals intentionally avoid paying taxes on household help like gardeners, maids and nannies. Ohio businesses that play by the rules and pay their taxes are forced to compete against cheating businesses that can charge less, due to the lower cost of illegal workers. In both cases, Ohio is unable to collect the requisite taxes, Workers' Compensation fees and unemployment charges, which increases the cost for those businesses and individuals that do play by the rules.

Federally, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano recently and unwisely changed the policy on illegal workers detained during work-site raids. Instead of deportation, illegal workers are given temporary work permits in exchange for cooperation.

Once released, these individuals will flee to another city to find work. just as they did under the "catch and release" policy that was in place until 2005 when we changed the policy to "detention and remove."

The new policy came to light following an employer raid in Bellingham, Wash., that caught 28 illegal workers. The unemployment rate in Whatcom County, Wash., where Homeland Security just let 28 illegal workers legally back into the workplace, is 8.1 percent and more than 150 Americans had applied for the jobs that became available after the employer raid.

House Bill 184 aims to correct these problems.

House Bill 184 is similar to the Legal Arizona Workers Act that was passed in 2007, signed by then-Gov. Napolitano, and maintained by 59 percent of voters in 2008.

LAWA prohibits employers in Arizona from hiring illegal immigrants and requires them to use the E-Verify system to validate the identification of potential employees. Employers that violate LAWA are subject to having their licenses to operate suspended and, with repeat violations, revoked. Due to LAWA, many illegal immigrants have left Arizona and moved to states with more lenient laws (like Ohio) that permit a black market in labor to exist.

Importantly, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals — America’s most liberal appellate court — upheld LAWA, so there is little risk that the weaker Ohio version of LAWA wouldn’t survive the expected court challenge from pro-illegal immigrant groups and businesses seeking illegal cheap labor.

With Ohio’s unemployment increasing, such a law would provide much-needed job opportunities for those out-of-work Ohioans at both the unskilled and skilled levels. Specifically, many entry-level jobs — currently taken by border crossers (60 percent of all illegals) — and some technical-level jobs — currently taken by individuals who have overstayed their work or education visas (40 percent of all illegals) — would become open, as those illegally in those jobs were let go.

We all know that America is a nation of immigrants. Immigrants historically have infused new ideas and new ways of doing things into the American economy that, even today, makes us the envy of the world. The federal government must expand the number of H-1B skilled visas so that the best and brightest continue to work for America, not against it.

Likewise, the federal government must develop a temporary-worker program that allows companies to bring in the unskilled workers they need. This program must first require companies to hire Americans willing to do the work at market rates.

America also is a nation of laws. For too long, the federal government failed to enforce existing laws to secure our borders and crackdown on the hiring of illegal immigrants. It is time for states to reassert their powers under the 10th Amendment and take control over their jurisdictions. With the rapidly declining job market,

Ohioans deserve leaders who will fight for them.

Rep. Combs is right to fight for Ohioans. The Legislature and governor should assist his efforts by forcing more taxable labor out of the shadows, thereby opening jobs up for Ohioans and ensuring that everyone pays their fair share. Ohio jobs should be for Ohioans and legal immigrants.

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