

Immigration Enforcement: We Have to Deal with More Than One Thing At Once

At the close of the fiscal year, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency grandiosely boasted it had deported more illegal aliens than any other time in our nation's history. Of the estimated 11 to 20 million illegal aliens in the United States, approximately 393,000 were deported in 2010. On the surface, this record number of deportations seems like quite the accomplishment. However, at closer look it actually reveals a disturbing policy shift initiated by the Obama administration.

Over the years, ICE has developed a system in which it prioritizes the deportation of illegal immigrants who have committed serious crimes. While there is good reason to prioritize the removal of illegal aliens who pose a danger to our communities, the implementation of this policy under the Obama administration has excessively limited enforcement against virtually all other immigration lawbreakers. As a result, non-criminal illegal alien deportations plummeted by 30 percent in the last year. Unfortunately, this misguided policy shift has manifested itself in several ways and has huge consequences for the safety and prosperity of our nation.

First, because of their approach to immigration enforcement (or lack thereof), the Obama administration has severely weakened a successful program that allows ICE to establish partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies to carry out immigration law. This program – known as 287(g) – allows deputized personnel to hand over identified illegal immigrants to ICE for deportation. Although 287(g) was responsible for one-fifth of deportations in 2008, the Obama administration has limited the scope of this program to illegal aliens convicted of serious felonies. As a result, local law enforcement agents are forced to put ‘minor’ criminals back on the streets, some of which go on to commit additional, and sometimes more serious, crimes.

Second, although criminal arrests may be on the rise, worksite enforcement has been put to a halt by the Obama administration. Currently, there are nearly 15 million Americans without jobs while an estimated eight million illegal immigrants are working in the United States. Although worksite enforcement could open up millions of jobs for the unemployed, President Obama's administration has slashed worksite enforcement efforts. In fact, under the current administration, administrative arrests are down 77 percent, criminal arrests are down 60 percent, indictments are down 64 percent, and convictions are down 68 percent. In some instances when the administration has actually conducted worksite enforcement, ICE agents drove detained illegal immigrants back to work! This is simply unacceptable.

Third, the Obama administration has not only refused to deport detained illegal immigrants, but has sought to reward these same immigration lawbreakers with U.S. citizenship. Although so-called ‘comprehensive immigration reform’ failed to be considered during the 111th Congress, this by no means has stopped the administration from pursuing other means of amnesty for illegal immigrants. To this end, President Obama's administration has pursued administrative case-by-case amnesty for illegal immigrants and has instructed ICE to dismiss thousands of deportation orders. This move by the administration not only rewards reckless immigration violators, but exacerbates our ongoing illegal immigration crisis by sending the signal that we don't take our laws seriously.

As a result of the Obama administration's misguided policy shift, our streets are less secure, millions of Americans remain unemployed, and illegal immigration continues to be a problem. While serious criminals should be prioritized for removal, the Obama administration needs to do more than just enforce a few immigration laws. After all, during the 2008 presidential campaign, it was then-Senator Obama who famously said “I think it is going to be part of the president's job to be able to deal with more than one thing at once.”

Mr. President, now's the time to do more than one thing at once.

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