

Work site raids necessary

by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

There is friction on the left. The Obama administration is under mounting pressure from some of its liberal supporters to stop workplace immigration raids and instead put together a plan for comprehensive reform.

They are half right. The administration should certainly craft a comprehensive immigration bill, and the sooner the better. We need to fix our broken immigration system, and a comprehensive reform plan is our best hope to secure the borders while tackling the issue of what to do with 12 million illegal immigrants already in the United States. President Barack Obama has repeatedly promised “before Latino groups and on Spanish-language media” to make immigration reform a top priority of his presidency. And the longer he waits to keep that promise, the harder it will be to get anything through Congress.

Still, the work site raids must absolutely continue. If there are workers and employers who are breaking U.S. immigration laws, and we know there are, then they should be brought to justice by the controlling authority, which is in this case Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Otherwise, why have such an agency in the first place? And what other laws should we disregard? Besides, in many of these cases, it may be that some workers are actually being exploited, which usually comes to light only after an enforcement action of some kind.

Of course, the current system for apprehending, detaining and deporting illegal immigrants can be improved. Those apprehended in these raids should have access to legal counsel, and they shouldn't be mistreated in federal custody. And employers shouldn't get off the hook. If federal officials can prove that employers violated the law by knowingly hiring illegal immigrants, then they should put the employers in handcuffs with everyone else.

That seems to be the view of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, who last week discussed work site raids with the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Reform. Senators wanted to know about the first work site raid carried out under the Obama administration.

ICE agents swarmed Yamato Engine Specialists, an engine remanufacturing plant, in Bellingham, Wash., and arrested 28 illegal immigrants. Napolitano said she had asked ICE for a review of the operation to make sure it was done in the fairest and most efficient way possible. Some immigration activists read those remarks to mean that, since she was asserting this kind of oversight, Napolitano planned to put a stop to further raids.

For the sake of the integrity of our immigration laws, we hope not.

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