

Department of Homeland Security unveils comprehensive immigration enforcement strategy for the nation's interior

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today unveiled a comprehensive immigration enforcement strategy for the nation's interior.

The new interior enforcement strategy represents the second phase of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), which is the Department of Homeland Security's multi-year plan to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration. The first phase of the SBI remains focused on gaining operational control of the nation's borders through additional personnel and technology, while also re-engineering the detention and removal system to ensure that illegal aliens are removed from this country quickly and efficiently.

The interior enforcement strategy will complement the Department's border security efforts by expanding existing efforts to target employers of illegal aliens and immigration violators inside this country, as well as the many criminal networks that support these activities. The primary objectives are to reverse the tolerance of illegal employment and illegal immigration in the United States. To meet these objectives, the strategy sets out three primary goals or courses of action that will be carried out simultaneously:

" The first is to identify and remove criminal aliens, immigration fugitives and other immigration violators from this country. " The second is to build strong worksite enforcement and compliance programs to deter illegal employment in this country. " The third is to uproot the criminal infrastructures at home and abroad that support illegal immigration, including human smuggling / trafficking organizations and document / benefit fraud organizations.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said, "Illegal immigration poses an increasing threat to our security and public safety, and hard-hitting interior enforcement will reinforce the strong stance we are taking at our borders. With the interior enforcement strategy of the Secure Border Initiative, we will aggressively target the growing support systems that make it easier for aliens to enter the country and find work outside of the law. This department will counter the unscrupulous tactics of employers with intelligence-driven worksite enforcement actions and combat exploitation by dangerous smuggling organizations with the full force of the law.

ICE Assistant Secretary Myers said, "This strategy lays down a detailed roadmap for ICE and Homeland Security to pursue in addressing the massive illegal alien problem in this country. Reversing growing tolerance for the employment of illegal aliens and for illegal immigration in general is critical to achieving success in this task."

Goal one: identify and remove criminal aliens, fugitives and other immigration violators

" Identify and remove incarcerated criminal aliens -- The prisons and jails in this country are estimated to book roughly 630,000 foreign-born nationals on criminal charges annually. Too often, the criminal aliens among this population are not removed from the country upon completion of their criminal sentences, but released into society. To combat this problem, ICE will expand its Criminal Alien Program and its 287(g) agreements with state/local correctional institutions to ensure these aliens are properly identified while in jail and removed immediately after serving their sentences. Currently, there are four correctional/detention facilities around the

country that participate in the 287(g) program, while numerous agencies have pending requests with ICE for such agreements.

" Locate and remove immigration fugitives -- There are more than 590,000 aliens at large in this country who are fugitives that have been ordered removed by an immigration judge. This number is increasing at a rate of more than 40,000 each year. ICE Fugitive Operations teams are charged with tasked with locating and arresting these fugitives. Since ICE was created in March 2003, these teams have arrested more than 42,000 aliens, of which 31,000 were fugitives. More than 29,000 of these individuals have been removed from the country. To help combat this problem, ICE will expand the number of Fugitive Operations teams from the existing 35 teams to 52 teams by the end of this fiscal year, with an additional 1,000 arrests projected per team, per year. The goal for ICE Fugitive Operation team arrests this fiscal year is approximately 25,000 arrests. ICE also plans to open a Fugitive Operation Support Center to assist field agents and officers in record checks and processing real-time leads from national computer databases.

" Target and remove visa violators - A substantial portion of the illegal aliens in this country are visa violators, with an estimated 165,000 new visa violations occurring annually. ICE created the Compliance Enforcement Unit in June 2003 to focus on high-risk visa violators by using new computer systems such as the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to flag violators. Since its inception, this unit has sent more than 10,000 leads to ICE field offices resulting in 2,100 arrests. ICE will be expanding the capacity of this unit and other visa compliance efforts of its field offices. The Fiscal Year 2007 budget request seeks an additional \$10 million for ICE compliance enforcement efforts. Last year, ICE arrested more than 6,000 visa violators nationwide.

" Target and remove aliens that pose criminal / national security threats - There are numerous illegal aliens at large in this country that pose criminal and/or national security threats. ICE has created several programs to combat this problem. ICE's Operation Community Shield targets foreign-born gang members and has resulted in the arrest of 2,400 gang members since its inception in 2005. ICE has requested 322 position enhancements for Operation Community Shield in Fiscal Year 2007. ICE also launched Operation Predator in 2003 to target, among others, illegal alien child sex offenders. This effort has resulted in more than 7,500 arrests, most of whom were alien child sex offenders. ICE also has more than 200 agents assigned to the nation's Joint Terrorism Task Forces. Last year, these agents made roughly 270 arrests for criminal or administrative immigration charges.

" Provide real-time information to law enforcement officers - The ICE Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) in Vermont provides real-time assistance 24 hours-per-day, 365 days-a-year to federal, state, and local law enforcement officers who are investigating or who have arrested foreign-born nationals involved in criminal activity. The LESL has responded to more than 1.3 million such requests in the last two fiscal years and has lodged more than 7,000 immigration detainers in response to such requests this fiscal year. ICE will be expanding the capacities of the LESL.

Goal two: build strong worksite enforcement and compliance programs to deter illegal employment

" Punish knowing and reckless employers of illegal aliens - Employers that knowingly and recklessly employ illegal aliens must be punished. ICE has already initiated a strategic shift in the way it approaches such employers by bringing criminal charges against them and seizing their illegally-derived assets -- rather than relying on the old tactic of administrative fines as sanctions. Last fiscal year, this new approach resulted in 127 criminal convictions, up from 46 the previous fiscal year. More employers are also being charged with money laundering violations, which can result in prison sentences of up to 20 years. Last year, a single ICE worksite enforcement investigation resulted in a settlement and forfeiture of \$15 million, an amount that represented the largest worksite enforcement penalty in U.S. history and surpassed the sum of all administrative fines from the previous eight years. ICE seeks to enhance its worksite enforcement investigations with proposed additional

funding. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2007 budget request seeks \$41.7 million in new funds and 171 additional agents to enhance ICE's worksite enforcement efforts.

" Eliminate Social Security abuses that support illegal immigration - Hundreds of thousands of workers in this country have registered "000-00-000" as a Social Security number. Millions have supplied social security numbers to their employers that do not match their names. This Social Security abuse provides a gateway for illegal aliens to obtain jobs. Currently, ICE does not have access to Social Security data to investigate these abuses. DHS is currently seeking a legislative fix in Congress that would provide ICE investigators with access to such data to combat this rampant fraud.

" Work with Congress to build employer compliance systems - Employers who want to stay within the law need a clear set of rules to follow. ICE and DHS will seek to develop an administrative regulatory program to provide clearer guidance to employers.

Goal three: uproot the criminal infrastructure that supports illegal immigration

" Target and dismantle human smuggling and trafficking organizations -- ICE investigations into human smuggling and trafficking organizations have resulted in 2,358 criminal convictions over the past two fiscal years. The number of ICE investigations launched into these organizations has increased from 2,564 in FY 2004 to 3,348 in FY 2005. ICE has begun applying its financial expertise to these investigations to target the illicit proceeds of these criminal organizations. ICE will continue to enhance its human smuggling and trafficking investigations and tighten its focus on the financial infrastructures of these organizations. One critical component of this effort will be the use of new Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BEST) along the Southwest border to pool intelligence information from numerous agencies to better attack these organizations. The Department of Homeland Security created a BEST in Laredo, TX, last summer that has had considerable success in targeting cross-border criminal organizations and related violent crime. Another BEST has been launched in Arizona and others are scheduled to be created in Southwest border locations. ICE will also be harnessing the resources of its Attaché offices in more than 50 foreign nations to target human smuggling and trafficking organizations overseas in partnership with foreign law enforcement.

" Detect and deter immigration-related document and benefit fraud -- In recent years, the problems of document and benefit fraud have surged, becoming increasingly sophisticated and lucrative. ICE established an Identity and Benefit Fraud Unit in 2003 to help address this problem. Over the past two years, the number of document and benefit fraud investigations launched by ICE has increased from 2,334 in FY 2004 to 3,591 in FY 2005. Criminal convictions in these cases have increased from 559 to 992 during this period. Earlier this month, ICE teamed up with officials from the Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of State and other agencies to create new "Document and Benefit Fraud Task Forces" in 10 major U.S. cities to combat this growing problem. Led by ICE, the task forces will build on existing partnerships to bring investigators together from a variety of agencies with expertise in different aspects of document and benefit fraud.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.