

Employers the key to immigration reform

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ISSUE: Employers fight against immigration crackdown.

Employers in states like Indiana, Kentucky, Oklahoma and California are finally speaking out in a way that is necessary to form a more sensible consensus on immigration reform. In response to government attempts to revoke their licenses for hiring illegal immigrants, many employers are challenging the government crackdowns in state legislatures, federal courts and city halls.

This is as it should be. Instead of hiding in the shadows waiting for Congress to hash out legislation to fix the broken immigration system — which thus far has amounted to nothing more than futile and disappointing activity — employers should be among those at the forefront of the debate. They need to prod the government to develop a plan that protects U.S. borders, while at the same time accommodating temporary workers and creating a path to permanent status for productive, non-documented immigrant workers already embedded in the U.S. economy.

Jobs, after all, are what draw most immigrants to America, and the businesses that hire them for paltry wages carry much of the blame for the immigration problem on their shoulders. But the idea that America can scare 12 million illegal immigrants into going back home by rounding and deporting a small fraction is an impractical proposal. It only splits families, deprives them of bread-winning heads of households and would wreak havoc on the U.S. economy.

What's most interesting about employers' new fight for immigration is that it pits many business owners against hard-line Republicans in Congress, who stalled immigration legislation because it didn't meet all their anti-immigrant demands.

Hopefully, those elected officials will listen to one group of constituents deeply impacted by immigration policy: Employers who rely on immigrants for labor.

BOTTOM LINE: Their voice is needed in this national debate, and could lead to sensible immigration reform.