

Vilsack, Guard chief blast feds

Actions in Marshalltown raid called 'completely unacceptable'

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In a blunt and stinging letter, the governor and the top officer of the Iowa National Guard on Tuesday called federal immigration officials' actions in the Swift raids "completely unacceptable," saying agents undermined the public's trust in government, potentially jeopardized the safety of law enforcement personnel in Iowa and could have compromised undercover operations.

Gov. Tom Vilsack and Maj. Gen. Ron Dardis, in a letter Tuesday to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, said they will not cooperate with federal immigration officials in the future unless they act more responsibly and provide better coordination with state officials.

Immigration officials "chose to pursue a solitary path that limited the operation's effectiveness, created undue hardship for many not at fault, and led to resentment and further mistrust of government," Vilsack and Dardis wrote.

The arrests Dec. 12 of 1,282 workers at Swift & Co. meatpacking plants in Marshalltown and in five other states represented the biggest crackdown in history on immigration violations at one company. The raids were executed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security.

Vilsack and Dardis said ICE officials failed to advise the Iowa National Guard of the size and scope of the raid, which "could have led to unacceptable risks to Guard personnel and property."

The raids could have compromised continuing local, state and federal law enforcement undercover operations, they said.

ICE gave Iowa little chance to prepare to deal with the humanitarian consequences of the raids, they said.

And the "information blackout" ICE imposed after the raids made the situation worse, they said.

Although the Iowa National Guard's only role was to provide a temporary space to hold



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Family and friends of Swift & Company workers wait outside of the facility during a raid by federal immigration officials. Gov. Tom Vilsack and the top Iowa National Guard official said that the raid "created undue hardship for many not at fault, and led to resentment and further mistrust of government."

detainees, ICE's operations and lack of coordination thrust the Guard into the national spotlight "without the sufficient information or authority to plan or respond."

Federal agents failed to provide any information to Guard public affairs staff before or during the raids, then ICE public affairs in Washington, D.C., issued only one short news release more than 24 hours after the raids began.

After promising to hold a news conference at Camp Dodge, ICE failed to do so, they wrote.

"The complete lack of an adequate media plan in the age of 24-7 news coverage is completely unacceptable," they wrote. "These systemic failures to communicate with the public and news organizations created an information vacuum that was filled with unreliable and unverifiable rumors that further undermined the public's trust and confidence in both the state and federal government."

Rather than working with local, state and federal law enforcement branches in Iowa, ICE worked alone, they said.

"This lack of coordination among law enforcement and military authorities is completely unacceptable in this post 9/11 and (Hurricane) Katrina world," they wrote.

They ended the letter with this warning:

"In order to prevent similar or greater problems in the future, please note that the Iowa National Guard, at both Camp Dodge and throughout our state, will now require proper notification to the governor and appropriate law enforcement personnel, as well as a thorough and synchronized media plan, before we again agree to provide any space for future actions or operations by ICE."

As of Tuesday evening, 1,283 people had been arrested in connection with the Swift raids and charged with non-criminal administrative violations.

Of those, 144 had also been charged with criminal violations: one with re-entering the United States after deportation and 143 with identity theft or a fraud-related charge.