

Over 40 Arrests in Nev. Immigration Raid

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By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. (AP) -- Federal agents raided 11 McDonald's restaurants in northern Nevada and made dozens of arrests Thursday as part of an investigation into illegal immigration.

Agents for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement made at least 56 arrests in Reno, Sparks and Fernley after raids at the restaurants and a franchise corporate headquarters in Reno, agency spokesman Richard Rocha said.

"They are people suspected of being in the country illegally. As far as I know, they were all McDonald's employees," he told The Associated Press.

The investigation began five months ago and was sparked by an identity theft complaint, Rocha said. A local law enforcement agency then gave ICE information that illegal immigrants were working at specific McDonald's restaurants, he said.

Luther Mack, who owns at least some of the restaurants that were raided, insisted that his businesses require employees to provide documentation.

"As an employer, I do not knowingly hire or employ undocumented or unauthorized workers," Mack said in a statement.

Lisa Howard, a spokeswoman for McDonald's Corp., based in Oak Brook, Ill., said the company had no comment on the arrests.

"This is a local situation with a local operator," she said.

The raids drew immediate criticism from Reno Mayor Bob Cashell and activists, who estimated the number of arrests to be closer to 100.

The mayor joined a news conference area Hispanic leaders and members of the American Civil Liberties Union called in front of the federal courthouse late Thursday.

"We don't approve of the Gestapo methods ICE is using," said Gilbert Cortez, a Latino leader who urged Hispanic workers to stay home from work in protest Friday.

Cashell, a Republican and former lieutenant governor, said that if identity theft was involved, that was wrong, and that he opposed a protest that would keep workers at home on Friday.

He said he would contact Nevada's congressional delegation and ask the city council to look into the raids. He said that he opposes illegal immigration, as well as immunity for illegal immigrants, but that "there has to be a better way to do this."

"Think of some of the people who were arrested and picked up; they have children. They don't know where their mama or their daddy is. That's not right."

ICE was working with Washoe County social services to help provide care for children, Rocha said. The detainees were allowed to telephone their family during the processing, he said.

The workers arrested were being processed Thursday night and will be transferred to an unidentified local detention center to await deportation proceedings, Rocha said.

The ICE has made several raids in recent months, including large ones at meatpacker Swift & Co., poultry plant Crider Inc. and leather factory Michael Bianco Inc.

Social service advocates said arrests in March at the Michael Bianco factory in New Bedford, Mass., created a humanitarian crisis, with some children left with no one to care for them.