GOP Pushes Mandatory Use of E-Verify

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The new Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday began another effort to force all employers to use the E-Verify system, designed to prevent the hiring of undocumented immigrants.

The program, established in 1997, has processed millions of requests for verification on the part of employers. More than 90 percent of the potential employees were found eligible to work in the United States.

"With unemployment over 9 percent now for 21 months, jobs are scarce and families are worried," Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas), said Thursday at the start of a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement Hearing on the E-Verify program.

"There are millions of people who work in the U.S. illegally and those jobs should go to legal workers," according to Smith, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee.

E-Verify, now a voluntary system, is run by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS, in conjunction with the Social Security Administration.

Between October 2009 and August 2010 E-Verify processed approximately 14.9 million requests made by almost 222,000 employers, Richard M. Stana, director of Homeland Security and Justice Issues for the U.S. Government Accountability Office, told lawmakers Thursday.

Some 2.3 percent of those requests led to confirmations that those people did not have permission to work, while another 0.3 percent corresponded to job applicants whose situation was doubtful but who were confirmed later to be allowed to work legally, Stana said.

Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.), chair of the immigration subcommittee, said that "making E-Verify universally mandatory would ease the cumbersome and easily manipulated I-9 process employers now use to screen employees."

But the pro-immigrant group America's Voice says imposing E-Verify without broader immigration reform would hurt the U.S. economy.

"It's ironic that the so-called 'pro-business party' is pushing a policy that would decimate one of the key sectors of the American economy," the group's executive director, Frank Sharry, said in a statement issued on the eve of the congressional hearing.

"Evidently, pandering to radical elements in the GOP that actually believe it's possible and desirable to deport 11 million undocumented workers is more important than maintaining a home-grown agriculture industry," Sharry said.