

Legislator defends stance on E-Verify bill

By Mike Jorgenson

Guest opinion

This past week and again on March 23 someone pointed out to me the news reports in the *Idaho Business Review* on my Senate bill which, if ultimately enacted into law, would compel Idaho's businesses to use the Department of Homeland Security's E-Verify online computer program to confirm prospective new employees are legally entitled to accept employment in Idaho.

As is the case in almost every instance of online reporting which allows readers' comments to be posted, the vast majority of comments were in favor of what I am proposing. I would add that the comments in your newspaper were perhaps more gratifying as your readers would almost certainly be composed of individuals within the overall business community of our state.

While the Senate State Affairs Committee has denied giving the bill hearings during this legislative session, no one should believe this issue will soon go away. A Rasmussen poll published March 18 shows 68 percent of Americans want employers who hire illegal aliens to be punished.

My desire to see this legislation enacted stems exclusively from the skyrocketing costs that are directly the result of unfettered illegal immigration into this state. Opponents of "enforcement-minded" legislators, such as I have been described, repeatedly attack virtually every aspect of legislation which calls for mandatory use of E-Verify, calling it unreliable and onerous on businesses. There are also the never far behind arguments that citizens and

legal immigrants do not want these jobs and that costs will rise, causing ag and other industries to fail.

However, the costs to the taxpayers of Idaho due to the employment of illegal aliens are what are clearly onerous. Let me be specific, utilizing statistics and information supplied by state agencies:

- 51,000 Idahoans are currently out of work, costing the state millions in unemployment benefits.

- There are 475 foreign convicted felons in state penitentiaries, of which 425 are Mexican nationals; the annual cost of incarcerating these people is \$9 million per year.

- The one-time cost of convicting a foreign national is estimated at \$20,000, meaning \$10 million was spent securing these convictions against the Mexican prison population in Idaho's state prisons.

- There are at least 15,000 Spanish-speaking students in Idaho's public schools who take part in the state's LEP (Limited English Proficiency) program — this represents 85 percent of the total in the program; no other language makes up even 2 percent of the total LEP student population.

- The annual cost of educating these 15,000 students, according to the state of Idaho is \$90 million per year.

What I am advocating for is enforcement of existing laws requiring Idaho's employers to effectively check the employment status of their prospective employees and to be penalized if they do not. First infraction: loss of license for three days; second infraction: loss of license for 10 days; and third infraction:

loss of business license.

E-Verify is the tailor-made solution for businesses to avoid these infractions and to protect themselves against fraudulent documents. E-Verify is a free computer program created more than a decade ago. Its rate of accuracy has been much maligned, but statistics indicate it is accurate at least 95 percent of the time.

More tellingly, the percentage of mismatched prospective employees who needed to seek clarified employment status was tiny: exactly 0.5 percent or one half of one percent.

Signing up and using E-Verify for the very first time has been physically demonstrated to me as taking approximately 7 minutes. The checking of any prospective employees thereafter should take less than 5 seconds. In fact, more than 93 percent of all nationwide checks take less than 5 seconds. Use of the program indemnifies employers in the event it is later found the program was in error. It protects employers and it is a leading tool in the fight against identity theft.

I have been called many things for my support of this bill. I have even been called "quixotic" for my unflagging desire to enforce existing employment laws. My friends, Idaho is suffering terribly from this recession. School budgets are being cut. Men and women are out of work. It is the responsibility of the Legislature to ensure its citizens' and legal immigrants' interests come before those of illegal foreign nationals here in Idaho.

Mike Jorgenson is the Republican state senator from District 3, representing Hayden Lake and other communities in the area.