

Colorado, let's see some ID

Denver Post (Colorado)

July 9, 2006 Sunday

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Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Section: BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL NEWS

Length: 762 words

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Body

Jul. 9--Some **Colorado** lawmakers have stumbled upon the actual cause of illegal immigration.

"Employers are the magnet," state Rep. Morgan Carroll, D-Aurora, told me last week.

So now there's a phalanx of bills pending in a special session of the legislature that would sanction businesses for hiring illegal immigrants.

Carroll's bill would not allow companies to receive state economic development aid unless they prove they do not have illegal workers anywhere in the United States. Seeking a government welfare check for your corporation's next move? Stop hiring illegal immigrants.

Other measures would impose penalties -- such as fines or denied tax exemptions -- on companies that hire illegal workers or fail to keep proper documentation on employees.

The state's business groups have been surprisingly slow to react to these potentially onerous proposals -- at least in public. Until Friday, most of their work involved lobbying behind the scenes.

"Their membership is split," said Carroll. "Half of their members hire illegal immigrants, know it, profit off of it and want to be left alone. The other half are actually complying with the law and feel that they are at an unfair competitive advantage." Joe Blake, president of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, disagreed.

"The majority of **Colorado** businesses are taking the necessary -- and federally required steps -- to verify that their employees are legally eligible to work in the United States," he told the Senate Business Affairs Committee on Friday.

Yes, but many of the estimated 250,000 illegal immigrants in **Colorado** -- and 12 million nationwide -- are working somewhere, which is why Gov. Bill Owens called this special session.

Chuck Berry, chief executive of the **Colorado** Association of Commerce and Industry, said many businesses don't want to take a stand, fearing unwarranted hassle from federal enforcement agencies.

"Most business don't want to testify," he said. "They don't want to be known. -- They think somebody will come snooping around. They just want to lay low." For now, Berry's group is doing what it can to keep state lawmakers from turning businesses into immigration law enforcement agencies. On Friday, Berry testified against a bill that would fine companies that do not apply to be part of a federal pilot program that verifies Social Security numbers. Yes, a fine for not applying to an experimental pilot program that may or may not be around in the future.

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Every nation has a right to control its borders. But our national leaders -- who raise campaign funds from businesses -- have declined to exercise this right for decades.

So today, we're swamped with folks who want to wash our cars, mow our lawns, pick our vegetables, slaughter our cattle, build our homes, and clean our toilets for below-market wages. And this is a crisis for state government to solve?

Rep. Al White, R-Winter Park, doesn't want to solve it. He wants to divert it.

"If immigration is a flood that is coming at us from all over, then let's raise the dike by adopting more stringent employment requirements than the surrounding states have," he said. "If there's a flood, and you put sandbags around your basement, do you know where the water goes? It goes into your neighbor's basement." Do you hear that, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Oklahoma and New Mexico? Better break out the pump.

White is the sponsor of a bill that would impose fines on employers that fail to keep records of employee's driver's licenses or state ID cards, which are increasingly difficult to counterfeit.

Blake told lawmakers his group would consider supporting the measure -- "consider," I believe, being the key word.

"We must remember that many of Colorado's key employers require seasonal labor, and that time-consuming processes such as ID card requirements might prevent businesses from quickly ramping up employment -- which ultimately will harm these companies and Colorado's economy," Blake said.

Yeah, we sure don't want to hurt the state economy by checking all those IDs.

Al Lewis' column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays. Respond to Lewis at denverpostbloghouse.com/lewis, 303-820-1967 or alewis@denverpost.com.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: DP

Acc-No: 20060709-DP-LEWIS-COL-20060709

Subject: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (92%); IMMIGRATION (91%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); FOREIGN LABOR (90%); FINES & PENALTIES (89%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (89%); LOBBYING (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (78%); RECRUITMENT & HIRING (78%); LEGISLATION (77%); SOCIAL SECURITY (75%); US SOCIAL SECURITY (75%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (73%); BORDER CONTROL (73%); PENDING LEGISLATION (72%); CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE (71%); ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (71%); EXECUTIVES (70%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (68%); CAMPAIGN FINANCE (64%)

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Company: COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INSURANCE CO (53%)

Industry:

Geographic: DENVER, CO, USA (79%); **COLORADO**, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (92%)

Load-Date: July 11, 2006

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