

Ritter: Immigration enforcement a federal job

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Body

Mar. 3--Bill **Ritter** says arresting and deporting illegal immigrants is a federal issue and that Colorado police departments and jails would be swamped if they were given that responsibility.

Ritter, the sole Democrat running for governor and a former Denver district attorney, said he supports enforcing federal **immigration** laws, but does not agree that county and city law **enforcement** should be given that job - as has been advocated by some state and federal lawmakers.

"Having the Denver Police Department and others take on the job of enforcing federal **immigration** laws would swamp our county jails to overflowing in no time," he said. "I support enforcing the federal laws, but it is a federal issue that needs to be addressed nationally."

Currently, Colorado police departments have no authorization from federal **Immigration** and Customs **Enforcement** officials to enforce federal laws. Some states, such as Florida, have been granted limited authority to do so, but Colorado has not sought that, according to an ICE spokesman.

U.S. Rep. Bob Beauprez and Marc Holtzman, the two Republicans running for governor, have been taking a hard line in talking to voters about stopping illegal **immigration**. Beauprez has said he would have Colorado police departments involved in enforcing **immigration** laws, if elected.

Holtzman, the former president of the University of Denver, has said he would work to guarantee that cities, such as Denver, did not give "sanctuary" to illegals by not notifying ICE agents when police detain an illegal immigrant.

On the larger subject of illegal **immigration**, **Ritter** said he supports President Bush's proposal to establish a guest worker program to allow illegals to pay a fine and obtain temporary work permits.

Unlike Beauprez and Holtzman, who are dueling for GOP support, **Ritter** now has an open field as the sole Democrat running. State Rep. Gary Lindstrom, D-Breckenridge, dropped out earlier this week and endorsed **Ritter**.

"I haven't been positioning myself for a primary," **Ritter** said. "All along I've been talking about the same issues."

Among those issues are broadening health insurance coverage for state residents, improving public schools, and doing more to support the development of alternative energy, he said.

Colorado Republicans are smarting after losing a majority in the Legislature in 2004, so they are focused on trying to hold the governor's office in November.

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Asked how a **Ritter** administration would differ from a Republican governor, **Ritter** gave a short list of issues, starting with health care.

"There are 770,000 people in Colorado without health insurance and that's a crisis to me," he said. Pointing to states such as Pennsylvania, where lawmakers have adopted comprehensive health legislation that includes guaranteeing coverage, protecting doctors from malpractice claims and workers compensation reform, **Ritter** said Colorado needs to do the same.

"I'm not putting forward a specific plan, but I would get all the stakeholders in one room and get them to develop ways to improve health care statewide," he said. "That's the role a governor can play in getting this done."

Unlike his Republican opponents, **Ritter** does not support vouchers to allow parents to send their children to any school, public or private.

"I think our focus should be on improving our public schools for all students," he said. "When state voters approved Amendment 23 (mandating an increase in school funding each year) I think that was a pretty clear message they support our public schools."

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