

## *A simple tool to help stem the tide*

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### **Body**

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Polls and letters to the editor show that many Georgians share the growing anti-immigrant sentiment now sweeping the nation.

Georgians are angry at immigrants for taking jobs. They're angry at them for speaking a different language. They're furious at them if they get public assistance.

So, many Georgians might applaud last week's sweep by immigration officials of the labor-intensive onion fields of Vidalia. The foray netted 178 illegal workers, who were arrested and put on a bus back to Mexico or given a month to pack up and leave.

But it appears law enforcement officials forgot one thing: the employers. While they were swift to crack down on the laborers, they failed to mete out equal justice to those who hired them. By Friday morning, no onion growers or crew chiefs had been arrested, despite a 1986 law that prohibits the hiring of undocumented workers.

Those who believe illegal immigrants unfairly rob Americans of jobs should redirect their anger toward employers. "This whole operation ignores that employees don't take jobs - employers give them," says Mike Monahan, director of the Georgia Legal Services migrant project in Tifton.

Illegal immigration is fueled by one thing: employment. The lure of jobs is what draws most illegal workers to America. That's why cutting off employment is the single best means for stemming the flow. And the best tool for doing that is the national registry proposed by the immigration commission chaired by former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan.

While the 1986 law requires employers to check a worker's immigration status, there is no means of verifying it. Workers need only present any of 29 documents as proof of legal status. Many of those documents are easily forged.

The beauty of the registry is that all employees would be part of it. Contrary to charges that it would increase discrimination, the registry would decrease it. Everyone applying for a job - not just those who look or sound foreign-born - would be required to present identification.

One way to reduce the ire toward legal immigrants is to stop the entry of illegal immigrants. The registry helps draw the distinction.

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