

[A phony tool to stop illegal immigration](#)

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Body

The substantive debate over [immigration](#) is simpler than many might think: If we cannot say no effectively, the meaning of the yes that America has always said to legal immigrants will continue to erode. The principal attraction for [illegal](#) immigrants is jobs. So preventing unauthorized employment is the linchpin of a pro-American [immigration](#) system.

But [immigration](#) politics are twisted. People who claim to want answers will reject real solution so they can continue to make noise about "the problem." Consider the reaction to the December report from the Department of Homeland Security evaluating E-Verify. E-Verify, a system for deterring employment of [illegal](#) workers, is a voluntary federal program that is rapidly becoming mandatory -- so far in Arizona and Mississippi and [for federal contractors](#) -- in which a new hire's work authorization is supposed to be verified electronically. It began as a unanimous [1994 recommendation of the bipartisan U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform](#). One of us served on that commission, and the other was its communications director. Not to put too fine a point on it, the electronic verification idea behind E-Verify was ours.

And we said 16 years ago that verifying documents but not identities was fatally vulnerable to fraud.

The substance and the politics of [immigration](#) grind along at a glacial pace, so we weren't surprised to see the [DHS-commissioned Westat report on E-Verify](#) note that it fails to identify [illegal](#) workers more than half the time. In fact, Westat found that the system could fail nearly two-thirds of the time as a result of [illegal](#) workers using identities stolen from American workers.

But the reaction from the anti-[immigration](#) side of the debate was largely [phony](#) politics.

Westat documented that the problem is not legal workers who are denied jobs, a problem that is rare and easily fixed, but [illegal](#) workers who are not. The hiring of [illegal](#) workers is very common, and E-Verify has to be fixed to prevent it.

[Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies called the Westat report proof that "E-Verify's glass is half-full."](#)

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Nonsense. The report shows that E-Verify is a glass so thoroughly cracked that it lets illegal workers through faster than it stops them.

What a powerful incentive for impostor fraud this is: Large, organized criminal rings steal the identities of legal workers, often U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico, and then sell or rent them to illegal workers looking for Hispanic-surnamed legal worker identities. E-Verify does for identity theft what Prohibition did for Al Capone.

Fortunately, there is an alternative. It's called NEVA, the [New Employee Verification Act](#). NEVA has two tiers: a mandatory, wholly electronic system that deprives employers of any discretion -- a simple red light/green light that a new hire has cleared or not.

NEVA's second tier is voluntary, with authentication linked to a biometric identification (such as a fingerprint) to empower individual Americans to protect their identities from theft. Solid conservatives such as Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Tex.) and some of E-Verify's long-standing critics, including Rep. Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.), support NEVA because it is a private-sector approach in which free enterprise will compete to protect privacy and security.

Key "Blue Dog" Democrats in the House, such as Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona and Dennis Moore of Kansas, also support NEVA's alternative to the epic failures of

E-Verify.

Verifying documents without authenticating identity cannot work. Protecting identity from theft has to be the first step before any kind of ID system can work. In fact, empowering individuals to protect themselves from identity theft makes a national ID card unnecessary.

Yet restrictionists like Krikorian do not recognize documented proof of E-Verify's catastrophic failure rate in its primary mission as a reason to support the better system already drafted into legislation. No, they attacked NEVA proponents, as if insisting on effective verification means not wanting to close the back door to illegal immigration. E-Verify's apologists are doubling their bets when they should be throwing in their cards.

We believe in legalization as well as legal immigration. Effective verification is the key to both. The American public will not support a sensible legalization plan nor keep the front door open while the back door is off the hinges. That's why the anti-immigration lobbies are hypocritically insisting on an E-Verify system that does not work.

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