

Registry protects legal immigrants

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Body

People from other lands risk life and limb to enter this country illegally for one reason: jobs. If they couldn't obtain employment so easily, many wouldn't come.

Last week, the House Judiciary Committee took the first step toward ending the "jobs magnet" by narrowly approving a national **registry**. Unfortunately, the measure faces an uphill battle on the House floor.

It shouldn't. The **registry** offers a way for employers to verify the **legal** status of all job applicants, and would leave them with no excuse for having hired illegal labor.

Since 1986, it has been against the law for employers to hire illegal **immigrants**, but that law has lacked teeth. While employers must check every **immigrant's legal** status, applicants can use any of 29 documents as proof, and many are easily forged.

The national **registry** would combine data from the Social Security Administration and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. All job applicants, including U.S. citizens, would be required to show their Social Security card or green card. A phone call to a toll-free number would verify that the person was legally eligible for employment.

Unfortunately, some Republicans have branded it the "1-800-BIG- BROTHER" line. They argue that the **registry** would invade privacy and involve the government in every hiring decision.

That's ridiculous. Most citizens already must present their Social Security number to get a job. If privacy is the concern, safeguards could be added to ensure that a person's **legal** status is the only information that can be obtained.

Immigration advocates also oppose the **registry**, fearing it will be used to harass anyone who looks or sounds foreign. In fact, a national **registry** should lessen discrimination. Foreigners would no longer be singled out, because every job applicant's **legal** status would be checked.

Anti-**immigrant** sentiment is fueled in part by resentment toward those who enter this country illegally and benefit from its largesse. **Legal immigrants** should join the push for a national **registry**. It is in their interest to draw the distinction between those **immigrants** who are here in violation of the law, and those who are hard-working taxpayers who have made this country what it is.

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