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Company Audits Up, Illegal Worker Arrests Way Down Since 2008

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The Obama administration said it would focus its enforcement of illegal immigration laws by targeting workplace activities, but a recent report shows that while audits of employers are slightly up over the Bush administration, worker arrests are down drastically since the end of 2008.

Under Obama, employer audits are up 50 percent, fines have tripled to almost \$3 million and the number of executives arrested is slightly up over the Bush administration.

But under President Obama, the numbers of arrests and deportations of illegals taken into custody at work sites plummeted by more than 80 percent from the last year of the Bush administration. In the current fiscal year 2010, which ends Sept. 30, ICE has arrested 900 workers.

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That compares to immigration agents under Bush raiding hundreds of businesses from factory to farm -- and arresting and deporting more than 6,000 illegal immigrants in raids in 2008 -- more than 5,000 simply for being in the country illegally.

Current Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director John Morton reinforced claims of a tough stand by the Obama administration against illegal workers, telling Fox News recently that his agency has deported more illegal aliens -- and criminal illegals -- than at any other time.

"No administration in the history of this nation removed more illegal immigrants from the country than we did last year and I expect the records to continue. We're serious about enforcement. We're going to go out and we're just going to do it," he said.

But while both administrations agree that jobs are the magnet that attracts illegal immigrants to the United States, critics say it makes no sense to allow employees known to use fake or stolen identification to go free to duplicate the fraud again.

"When ICE is not following up on those aliens you have them going down the street to obtain another job and that is just moving the problem," said Julie Myers, an ICE director under Bush

Myers said while she agrees with the Obama administration's approach of targeting employers, "when I was at ICE, we didn't think we could ignore the aliens we encountered."

"It is tough when you have law enforcement turning a blind eye to entire categories of aliens -- and that is what is happening here -- it is a de facto amnesty," she said.

Marshall Fitz, director of immigration policy at the Center for American Progress, defended the administration's policy, saying that "rather than high-profile raids that target workers and let employers off the hook this administration has decided to focus on criminal and bad actor employers."

"No one is talking about giving a free pass for fraud, or ID theft is to be taken lightly, but we know the vast majority of the workforce did not commit any crime," Fitz said.

Employment is the driving force behind illegal immigration, which is why experts say work site enforcement is important. Bush aides say their high profile raids acted as a deterrent to both employer and employee, and punished both for breaking the law.

But others say the raids did little more than upset Latino communities, and advocates of Obama's approach say paper audits of employers -- not raids -- does more to turn off the job magnet.

Fox News' Nicole Busch contributed to this report.

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