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Johnson Introduces Legislation to Ensure a Legal U.S. Workforce

“Employers want, need, and deserve a reliable employee verification system.”

At a news conference today U.S. Congressman Sam Johnson (3rd Dist.-Texas), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Social Security, Committee on Ways and Means, introduced the New Employee Verification Act. Sparking new interest in the stalled-out immigration reform debate on Capitol Hill, the proposal would reform the nation’s approach to worksite enforcement.

“Employers want, need and deserve a reliable employee verification system and I want to give it to them,” said Johnson.

The New Employee Verification Act achieves three important objectives: ensure a legal workforce, safeguard workers’ identity, and protect Social Security.

First, this legislation draws upon lessons learned from the past to help guarantee a legal U.S. workforce for the future. The current failed, paper-based I-9 screening process is replaced with an Electronic Employee Verification System, known as EEVS. The system would rely on the use of fewer, more secure identity documents and would be built upon the new hire reporting process in each state. This program is already used by 90% of employers and was put in place a dozen years ago to track down dead beat dads.

For Americans, work authorization would be confirmed only through the Social Security Administration. This ensures that there is no “Big Brother” law enforcement agency building new databases on law abiding citizens.

For non-citizens, work authorization would be confirmed through the Department of Homeland Security that has the databases on visa and immigration status.

Second, the legislation would also help safeguard workers’ identity. A *voluntary* system would be created using the latest technology to authenticate and protect a worker’s identity. Private sector companies, certified by the federal government, would first verify work authorization in EEVS, but would also authenticate the identity of employees by utilizing existing background-check and document screening tools. The identity would then be secured through a biometric identifier, such as a finger print or eye scan.

This is the Secure Electronic Employee Verification System, SEEVS.

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In December 2006, nearly 1,300 workers in six states at Swift and Company were arrested, including many in Cactus, Texas. A Swift and Company human resource official testified before a House panel that Swift had willingly participated in the government's voluntary verification program for Social Security numbers since 1997.

“The raids at Swift shed light on the growing practice by illegal immigrants of using authentic documents - borrowed, rented or stolen - to avoid detection in the hiring process – and we must learn from it,” said Johnson.

Social Security Subcommittee Members Kevin Brady (8th Dist.-Texas) and Paul Ryan (1st Dist.-Wis.) co-sponsored the bill and spoke at the news conference.

At the event, Susan Meisinger, CEO for the Society for Human Resource Management, and Lynn Shotwell, Executive Director for the American Council on International Personnel, spoke in favor of the bill on behalf of the Human Resource Initiative for a Legal Workforce (www.legal-workforce.org).

The HR Initiative represents human resource professionals in thousands of small and large U.S. employers representing every sector of the American economy. The HR Initiative and its members are seeking to improve the current process of employment verification by creating a secure, efficient and reliable system that will ensure a legal workforce and help prevent unauthorized employment, a root cause of illegal immigration.

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