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## **Free-market economy demands free flow of labor**

### **IOWA VIEW**

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Iowa has just experienced the biggest anti-Hispanic raid by the U.S. government in history. The human-rights violations are myriad and tragic. However, far more tragic is our own refusal to deal with the reality of the world in which we live.

The government's excuse for this act of racial/ethnic cleansing is identity theft. What is not being said is that we need immigrant labor to keep our economy going. Period.

If we really want strict enforcement of our present immigration laws, we must also accept an economy like Russia's: stagnant, stratified, inefficient, anti-entrepreneurial, over-regulated and run by incompetent bureaucrats (like the folks who managed the government response to Hurricane Katrina). By the way - we will also have high unemployment.

A vibrant free-market economy, by its very nature, demands the free flow of capital, goods and services - including labor. A simple example: Compare the economies of East and West Germany during the Berlin Wall period. West Germany, with a vibrant free market, was the envy of Europe and could compete on a level with the United States and Japan. East Germany is still struggling to get its act together 15 years after collapse of the Berlin Wall.

The raids on the Marshalltown meatpacking plant are signs of weakness on our part and of our lack of a coherent domestic and foreign policy. With the lone exception of Cuba, our southern neighbors are all functioning democracies. However, their economies need both investment and attention from their rich and powerful neighbor to the north. Additionally, we need their help to protect our own southern border from real threats and real terrorists.

Former Mexican President Vicente Fox's election in 2000 was a huge breakthrough for both Mexico and us. Finally, we had a Mexican head of state that believed in the same free-market principles as the United States. Both he and President Bush saw the importance of a rational legal immigration policy, one that would assist economic growth and benefit both countries. Unfortunately, the events of 9/11 intervened. Our attention has been diverted, fixated on a distant conflict in Iraq that we created. In the meantime, we have ignored our southern neighbors, the ones closest to us in both history and friendship. We have hardened our border with Mexico, at the same time that the Mexican economy has slipped deeper into recession, creating ever more unemployed young workers.

Blinded by our own hubris, we have ignored and treated with disdain our southern Latino neighbors - at our own peril. While we have fiddled and blundered in the Middle East, China has moved in to Latin America and now controls a significant interest of the Panama Canal - which we built and controlled for years. China also is developing favored-nation trading ties with Latin America's largest economies.

With these raids, we have now abused the very neighbors who are here to help us, to be part of the American dream - indeed, whose forefathers were in this land long before our European ancestors set foot on these shores.

We live the 21st century, with a global economy, instant worldwide communications and access to the richest choice of goods and services the world has ever seen. Yet we insist on having an immigration policy modeled after 19th-century Europe, based on artificial national borders and distrust between neighbors - the model adopted by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The damaged economy of eastern Europe is still struggling to recover.

This is Iowa - the heartland of America. We do not abuse people here. We do not trample on their rights. We respect folks who work hard and value their families and their children. We need the Latinos to build our state and make us strong. We need to have a world view commensurate with both our abilities and our compassion.

JAMES BENZONI is a Des Moines attorney who specializes in immigration law and represents some of the workers arrested this week.