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Lawmakers say ID fraud can't be ignored

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Washington, D.C.— Members of the Iowa congressional delegation said today that they are concerned about the well-being of children whose parents were detained in a raid of the Swift & Co. plant in Marshalltown.

But both Democrats and Republicans also said that the federal government has an obligation to enforce laws against illegal immigration, and cannot overlook identification fraud.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Ia., said it is appropriate for Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enforce immigration law and investigate fake IDs used to gain employment at the meatpacking plant.

"The individuals engaged in producing these documents appear to be engaged in wide-scale fraud that puts law-abiding citizens at risk," Harkin said.

However, Harkin said the process used to detain suspects has been "murky and lacking transparency," and it's still unclear how many people are in custody or who they are.

His aides in his Senate office are continuing to ensure that those detained are provided due process and access to lawyers, Harkin said.

"We are not satisfied with the response that we have received from ICE regarding the treatment of some of those detained, including parents with young children" he said.

Rep. Tom Latham, R-Ia., whose district includes Marshalltown, said he is opposed to illegal immigration and supports "full enforcement" of federal laws for individuals as well as employers.

"My immediate concern at this time is for the well-being of any children who were affected by this action," said Latham. "I have offered the full support of my office to the American Red Cross to assist efforts to ensure their safety."

Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-Ia., said that the raid clearly illustrates the need for better identification check systems for employers.

"While this is never a pleasant situation, especially for the children, those being held or detained are accused of being illegal immigrants who have broken the law," Boswell said. "That being said, I'm interested in finding out why Swift & Co. employed so many illegal aliens."

Rep.-elect Bruce Braley, D-Ia., said he has called for greater enforcement of immigration laws, but the Bush administration needs to make sure the law is enforced not just against individuals but also against employers.

"Until employers realize that they will be held accountable for hiring undocumented workers, we will continue to have a problem with illegal immigration in the United States," Braley said.

Harkin said the situation highlights the need for comprehensive immigration reform, which failed to be approved in Congress this year. Better security at the borders is needed as well as a pathway to legal citizenship for immigrants already living in the United States, he said.