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Iowa delegation: U.S. obligated to enforce laws

RAID AFTERMATH: IOWA'S DELEGATION

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Washington, D.C. - Members of the Iowa congressional delegation said Thursday 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.

Harkin: 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. Harkin said the situation highlights the need for comprehensive immigration reform, which failed to be approved in Congress this year.

King: Rep. Steve King, R-Ia., a leading congressional opponent of illegal immigration, said that relatively few of the thousands of workers at Swift were actually arrested, which he said may mean some illegal immigrants "went through the net" and left town prior to the raid. He speculated that the focus for immigration agents also was on those involved in ID fraud, rather than all illegal immigrants. "We'll see if they follow up, and if Swift & Co. actually cleans up their workforce," said King. Children have been left behind when one or both parents were detained, and King said it's possible some of those children are American citizens and should be cared for as citizens. If the family wants to be reunited, "there is such a thing as a family reunion on the other side of the border," he added.

Grassley: Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Ia., said that as he has talked with Iowans, the message he has gotten is that taxpayers expect immigration officials to do their jobs and investigate whether immigrants have entered the country legally, especially if ID theft is suspected. "At the same time, I expect these investigations to be conducted in a humanitarian way," Grassley said.

Latham: Rep. Tom Latham, R-Ia., whose district includes Marshalltown, said that 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."

Boswell: Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-Ia., said 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."

Braley: 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.

Loebsack: Rep.-elect Dave Loebsack, D-Ia., said there are no easy solutions for the problem of illegal immigration. "We need a multifaceted approach to stem the tide of undocumented workers, secure our borders and deal with illegal immigrants that are already here," he said.