



**INDEPENDENT
JOURNAL REVIEW**

America First or the Free Market: Republicans Struggle to Agree Over Using E-Verify to Curb Illegal Immigration

Madison Dibble

January 8, 2019

Although most Republicans seem unified with President Donald Trump on building a wall to decrease illegal border crossings, there is another potential policy to thwart illegal immigration that leaves Republicans much more divided: E-Verify.

The dispute with Democrats over wall funding doesn't look like it will end anytime soon, but the resulting partial government has many talking about other policies that could be used to stop the flow of illegal immigrants.

From wall funding to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) to American amnesty laws, the national debate has made it clear that a wall alone will not solve the immigration issues at the southern border and that comprehensive immigration reform, while difficult to get through Congress, is needed in the United States.

As the immigration debate continues to roar, E-Verify is a key policy proposal that has been sidelined by Republicans — and not all conservatives are happy about it.

What is E-Verify?

During the 2016 presidential primary, former Gov. Chris Christie (R-N.J.) landed in hot water for comparing E-Verify to FedEx package deliveries. And while his comments were insensitive, his comparison does boil e-verify down to its basic idea.

E-Verify is an online system where employers enter all the relevant identification information from the IRS I-9 form, including full name, date of birth, and Social Security number, into a national database prior to hiring an employee. The information provided by the employee is cross-referenced and verified, ensuring that the employee is an American citizen or has the proper paperwork to work in the country legally.

If the information does not match, the employee can contest the results and clarify any errors that may have resulted in the denial.

E-Verify is already used in the United States, but it is not required by the federal government. However, two states do require employers to use e-verify: Arizona and Mississippi.

Why use E-Verify?

The main argument for a nationwide requirement of E-Verify is that it could make it incredibly difficult for illegal immigrants to find work in the United States, thereby pulling the economic incentive to cross the border illegally.

E-Verify supporters argue that this system, if used nationwide, would drastically cut back on the illegal immigration of those looking for a better economic situation in the United States because the migrants would have no way to financially support themselves in the U.S. This, in turn, would ensure that Americans have less competition when searching for jobs.

Supporters of the E-Verify system are wide-ranging in political philosophy. In a recent interview, Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) made the same case for E-Verify that pundit Ann Coulter has made several times on social media.

In fact, a Washington Post-ABC News poll from 2017 showed that 82 percent of Americans supported employers using a system like E-Verify to approve their employees.

The Republican divide

With 82 percent of Americans on board and full spectrum support from those on the right, why isn't E-Verify a done deal?

The short answer is money and liberty.

In his 2019 budget proposal, President Donald Trump asked for E-Verify to be mandated as part of the funding for border security, but the issue was quickly written out of any negotiations by House Republicans — and the president didn't seem to care.

The reason some Republicans are skeptical of mandatory E-Verify is that businesses stand to lose a lot of money and American citizens will be forced into another government bureaucracy. As the Cato Institute highlights, conservatives opposed to E-Verify can justify their opposition in three ways:

1. American employers shouldn't have to get the government's permission before hiring an employee.
2. E-Verify places the burden on employers to function within another layer of bureaucracy, forcing them to do the government's job of immigration enforcement.
3. It could still fail to prevent illegal immigrants from getting work if they have accurately forged documentation.

Beyond the Cato Institute, the American Civil Liberties Union argues that it denies Americans due process because they would be forced to provide the government this information despite not committing a crime.

Of course, money is another reason businesses (and the politicians they donate to) may not want to participate in E-Verify. Illegal immigrants may be willing to work for less money than Americans and may also fear reporting employers who don't pay minimum wage.

Coulter, who championed Trump during the 2016 campaign, has since turned a cold shoulder to Republicans over their immigration policy because she believes they are protecting businesses over everyday Americans.

In a lot of ways, the dispute within the GOP over E-Verify mirrors the dispute within the GOP over international trade. The argument can be boiled down to the finite balance between “America first” and the free market.

Champions of the free market aren’t going to want the government interfering in employment and forcing employers to hire more costly American citizens. Those who believe in the “America first” mentality don’t care if it costs American consumers so long as the American worker is protected.

While it isn’t exactly clear where the White House and congressional Republicans stand on the issue of E-Verify, the inaction speaks for itself. E-Verify, no matter the popularity and alleged support, isn’t being pushed by most Republicans.

With immigration reform again at the forefront of the American political discussion, it remains to be seen if E-Verify will be put on the table as part of the American strategy to curb illegal immigration.