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**CAPITOLIST**

## **Florida Republicans Should Reject Immigration Extremists on E-Verify**

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As Florida’s legislative session winds on, some Republicans are actually pushing a destructive government mandate for all employers in the state. These lawmakers want to force Florida businesses to use E-Verify—the web-based system that purports to check an individual’s eligibility to work in the United States.

That may sound alluring, but there are a number of problems that proponents are ignoring.

First, it means that Republicans—who purportedly believe in limited government—would be responsible for an onerous mandate that disproportionately harms small and family-owned businesses.

Second, E-Verify simply does not work as advertised. Republican leaders seem to have missed this memo, but there’s still time for them to read it before hurting Floridians who should not be prevented from making a living.

E-Verify “Final Non-Confirmations” block Americans from jobs a full 6 percent of the time, according to E-Verify.gov itself. An analysis by the Cato Institute found that about 0.15 percent of E-Verify queries result in false Final Non-Confirmations. Those numbers may sound small at first glance, but applied to the entire labor force, they mean over 187,000 people wrongly prevented from putting food on their table.

The Cato Institute also found that, since 2005, at least 568,283 legal workers have received erroneous Tentative Non-Confirmations. Native-born Americans in Florida have been blocked from employment due to E-Verify’s shoddiness. The Sun-Sentinel examined the case of Jessica St. Pierre who “lost a new telecommunications job because her employer flummoxed E-Verify by typing in two spaces after her last name. It took her three months to fix that and find another job.”

Blocking native-born American citizens who are fully eligible to work is a perfect reason why conservatives need to oppose E-Verify. It is a big-government mandate that results in ordinary Americans needing government permission to exercise their right to work. That sounds like a scheme conjured up by Bernie Sanders, not Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Meanwhile, the system fails to identify undocumented immigrants as ineligible to work. E-Verify produced rejections in one percent of queries in 2016, but undocumented immigrants at that time made up 4.8 percent of the workforce.

An independent review of E-Verify found that more than half the unauthorized workers screened were ultimately approved—it says so, right there on E-Verify’s own website.

In 2006, 1,300 meatpacking plant workers were busted by ICE in a high-profile raid. It turns out that nearly all had passed their E-Verify check. For those who say the system could improve fast, the evidence shows a different reality. Just last year, ICE raided Mississippi poultry operations. It turned out that 680 workers not authorized to work in the U.S. but working at the poultry plants nonetheless had passed E-Verify checks.

This is why E-Verify is opposed by President Trump, who recently cited his own experience: “I used [E-Verify] when I built the hotel down the road on Pennsylvania Avenue... And we would go through 28 people — 29, 30 people — before we found one that qualified. So, it’s a very tough thing to ask a farmer to go through that... You also have to have a world of some practicality.”

Farmers, of course, are a big concern in a state with a heavy agricultural footprint like Florida.

So who are the interests supporting the proposed E-Verify mandate? Spurious groups like Floridians for Immigration Enforcement (FLIMEN), which is tied to radical national anti-immigration group Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform (FAIR), itself founded by John Tanton—a notorious anti-immigration crusader with links to white nationalists and a cabal of other groups that any true conservative should fight against rather than embrace.

FAIR listed FLIMEN as a state based anti-immigration group worthy of support. David Caulkett, VP and founder of FLIMEN, is a Florida adviser for FAIR. And John Tanton’s shell company U.S., Inc. directly contributed to FLIMEN in 2015.

On a 2018 FAIR podcast, Mr. Caulkett said FLIMEN’s former legislative director had been working on E-Verify for “over ten years.” FLIMEN was in routine contact with Florida legislators in 2016 and 2017 about E-Verify before relevant bills were introduced. FLIMEN, again working with FAIR, tried to get an E-Verify mandate on the ballot, but the Florida Constitution Revision Commission said “no.”

FLIMEN blamed that outcome on the Florida Chamber Of Commerce—which opposes the current E-Verify scheme. FLIMEN will predictably blame Florida citrus growers for wanting unauthorized labor, but what businesses across all sectors are realizing that E-Verify will cut native-born American citizens out of the workforce, and do little to stop undocumented immigrants from working—and that is fundamentally unfair as well as undeniably destructive to Florida’s economy.

Groups like FLIMEN and FAIR don’t mind an unworkable and onerous mandate like E-Verify despite its fatal flaws because targeting immigrants is worthwhile to them even if hundreds of thousands of American citizens have to suffer the consequences of being blocked by their own government from getting a job.

Florida Republicans would do better to read the data from E-Verify itself and heed the concerns of conservatives who are legitimately worried about creating a repressive system where an American needs a government permission slip to simply provide for themselves and their families.