Busted: Business Group Led By Mike Fernandez Pushed Bogus Data to Fight Tougher CRC Immigration Proposal

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A group of Florida business leaders, including former GOP mega-donor **Mike Fernandez** and agriculture CEO **Paul "Mr. Tomato" DiMare**, held a conference call with Florida media today voicing their opposition to a proposal that would require every employer in Florida to screen potential employees for eligibility to work using the federal E-Verify system. Fernandez and DiMare relied on statistics from the business group behind the call, the American Business Immigration Coalition, which says a study they conducted concludes the proposed crackdown on illegal immigrant employment would have "devastating consequences for Florida's economy."

But the business leaders, who oppose the measure to crackdown on employment of illegal immigrants, quoted from a report that intentionally used bogus data to paint a horrific picture of what would happen to Florida's economy if the tougher immigration enforcement law were adopted. Virtually every statistic in the group's economic doomsday report was computed by pulling a single data point from a decade-old audit that actually concluded the exact opposite of what the business leaders said would happen.

The American Business Immigration Coalition admitted later in the day via email that it cherry-picked an inflated, 12 percent error rate that was reported by a single company back in 2007, instead of using the latest comprehensive federal data from hundreds of thousands of companies across the nation, which is easily obtained and updated as recently as April 10, 2018.

Fernandez and DiMare used the report to describe an economic "Armageddon" of statistics based entirely on the bogus 12 percent error number, including false claims that mandatory E-Verify could:

- Cost Florida employers as much as $4.7 billion dollars trying replace lost workers

- Result in 4.6 million hours of lost work in Florida alone

- Cause 1.1 million *legal* Florida workers to face job delays or lost work

All of those figures were computed using the bogus "12 percent" error rate, and in most cases, are directly contradicted by the very reports that the group later cited in their own report's footnotes that were ostensibly included to bolster its own credibility. For example, the report cites a report from the CATO institute that 1,173,360 legal Florida workers could lose their jobs or miss work because of errors. But the CATO report never actually makes that claim. In fact, CATO's report, which was actually published five years ago, concludes only that "hundreds of thousands of *Americans*" (certainly not 1.1 million Floridians) might be adversely impacted by errors in the system.

Digging deeper, the 12 percent error rate itself was plucked from an independent audit by Westat, which got that single number from one company, Intel Corporation. Of course, the Westat audit didn't only survey Intel, they also pulled data from 2,319 other companies.

Here's what the Westat audit actually found:

> The report estimated the program's total "accuracy" and "inaccuracy" rates (i.e., how consistent were the responses with the person's actual work authorization status) for the first time, finding that 96 percent of all E-Verify initial responses were consistent with the person's work authorization status, and that the remaining 4.1 percent inaccuracy rate was primarily due to identity fraud. Looking just at the group of authorized workers, Westat found that over 99 percent of that subset of E-Verify cases are initially found to be employment authorized – a resounding affirmation of the accuracy and efficiency of the system.

In short, the very audit report that Mike Fernandez, Paul DiMare and the American Business Immigration Coalition used to underpin their bogus claims actually concluded exactly the opposite: that E-Verify works and is extremely accurate.

So why did the American Business Immigration Coalition use a respected Florida business leader like Fernandez to push this bogus data and ignore the real numbers?

Simple. Fernandez is a billionaire and a former GOP supporter who opposes Republican initiatives to curb illegal immigration. His quotes make great copy for news reporters, and the American Business Immigration Coalition knows it. It's unclear if Fernandez or any of the other leaders were aware of the false statistics used in the report.

Two of Florida's largest news outlets, the Tampa Bay Times and News Service of Florida, both of which feed their stories to other print media and television stations across the state, gobbled up Fernandez's quotes and the group's fake numbers today and regurgitated all of it to their readers and viewers, not even bothering to verify the source or even question why they based their report on arbitrarily chosen and extremely old data in the first place.

To his credit, News Service reporter **Jim Turner** did at least cite the actual federal stats in his story, albeit after first citing the bogus 12% error rate figure and failing to note the source:

> *In part, critics of the proposal contend the new system would lead to errors that would affect businesses and workers. The fund's report is based on an error rates up to 12 percent reported by employers that audit their own E-Verify data.*

> *The Department of Homeland Security, which includes U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, put the accuracy rate of its system at 98.91 percent.*

Not mentioned by any other media outlet today: the remaining 0.95% of employment applicants who are initially flagged by the E-Verify system cannot be immediately barred from employment or prevented from working. They are simply instructed to contact the Social Security Administration or Department of Homeland Security to resolve the discrepancy. The doom-and-gloom pushed by ABIC, Fernandez, DiMare and the Florida media is simply a false narrative. Further, if the discrepancy is resolved (0.15% of all cases), nothing happens at all and life goes on as normal. But about 0.61 percent of applicants don't even bother to contest the discrepancy at all, while the remaining 0.35% of cases are unresolved for a variety of reasons including employer or applicant failure to complete the resolution process.

To summarize, today a super-sized dose of fake news from a pro-illegal immigrant worker group used respected Florida business leaders to pushed a bogus set of data to the Florida media. The Florida media predictably regurgitated it to the millions of people in their respective media markets across the state, and now pro-illegal immigrant lobbyists will use these fake media reports and false statistics to pressure members of the Constitution Revision Commission to vote against making E-Verify mandatory.