

Gallegly says administration not tough enough on undocumented workers

WASHINGTON — With the light tap of a gavel, [Rep. Elton Gallegly](#) began his reign as chairman of a congressional immigration panel on Wednesday and immediately attacked the Obama administration's efforts at cracking down on undocumented immigrants in the workplace.

Gallegly and other Republicans on the panel charged that, under President Barack Obama, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has relaxed the get-tough approach it had taken under former President George W. Bush in dealing with illegal workers.

The result, GOP lawmakers said, is illegal immigrants are taking jobs from American workers.

"The Obama administration's strategy clearly does a grave disservice to American workers," said Gallegly, the new chairman of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement.

Worksite enforcement must ensure "those jobs that are available go to Americans and legal immigrants," he said.

Gallegly, a Simi Valley Republican, has made the fight against illegal immigration the signature issue of his two-decade long congressional career. But he has promised "fair and responsible oversight" of immigration policy as the new subcommittee chairman.

Wednesday's hearing, the first under Gallegly's leadership, focused on whether Immigration and Customs Enforcement is doing enough to keep illegal immigrants out of the workplace. The title of the hearing: "ICE Worksite Enforcement: Up to the Job?"

The answer, at least for Republicans on the panel, appeared to be "no."

Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas and the new chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, charged that worksite enforcement has plummeted under the Obama administration, with administrative arrests of undocumented workers falling by 77 percent and criminal arrests falling by 60 percent over the past two years.

Criminal indictments have fallen 57 percent and criminal convictions have dropped 66 percent during the same period, Smith said.

Kumar Kibble, the immigration agency's deputy director, defended the agency's enforcement record. The Obama administration has placed a priority on investigating and prosecuting employers who exploit or abuse their workers and those who have a history of repeatedly employing an illegal work force, he said.

Over the past year, the agency initiated a record 2,746 worksite-enforcement investigations and arrested 196 employers for worksite-related crimes, Kibble said. The agency also issued a record 2,196 inspection notices to employees and 237 final orders that brought in fines totaling \$6.9 million. The \$6.9 million is the most fines issued since the agency was created in 2003, Kibble said.

"For the past two years, our worksite efforts have been part of a broader enforcement strategy that has seen the removal of more individuals from the United States than at any other time in the agency's history," Kibble said.

In 2010, he said, the agency deported nearly 393,000 people at a cost of \$12,500 per person, or a total of nearly \$5 billion.

Smith conceded the amount of fines collected has gone up. But the fines aren't much of a deterrent, he said, because in some cases they are so low they cost less than a New York City parking ticket.

Daniel Griswold, director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, a Washington-based think tank, disputed the notion that undocumented workers are taking jobs away from Americans.

There is no connection between high unemployment and the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States, he said. In fact, he said, the opposite is true:

Immigrants tend to flock to the country in greater numbers during periods of low unemployment when jobs are plentiful.

“We cannot enforce our way out of unemployment,” Griswold said, referring to efforts to remove illegal immigrants from the workplace.