



Billionsaire GOP donor takes shots at Richard Corcoran while debuting E-verify research

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Ahead of the Constitution Revision Commission's vote on a controversial amendment (**Proposal 29**) to establish an employment eligibility verification process aimed at keeping unauthorized immigrants from working in the state, a slew of business leaders are ramping up efforts to prevent the proposal from appearing on the November ballot — and the battle now has manifested as fiery political discourse.

The **IMPAC Fund** and the **American Business Immigration Coalition** compiled research released Thursday that suggests a constitutionally mandated employment verification system — which would be modeled after the federal E-verify system — could significantly disrupt business in the Sunshine State.

During a conference call with reporters on Thursday, GOP billionaire rainmaker **Mike Fernandez** stressed pro-immigration policies shouldn't be marked by party lines — the fight against E-verify is supported by the Florida Chamber and nationally by conservative billionaires **Charles** and **David Koch**.

But for some — particularly Republican state House Speaker **Richard Corcoran**, it seems to be the “flavor of the day,” Fernandez said.

Corcoran, who appointed P29 sponsor **Rich Newsome** to the CRC, is not “shy in his fear and misinformation about immigrants to move an agenda that is very personal to him based on misinformation and lack of facts,” Fernandez said.

During the 2018 Legislative Session, Corcoran championed a bill banning so-called ‘sanctuary cities,’ a term coined for local governments that refuse to cooperate with federal immigration authorities. Corcoran's Watchdog PAC released an ad earlier this year **suggesting** illegal immigration results in an uptick in violent crime ahead of the Speaker's anticipated entrance into the Governor's race. He **debated** Democratic gubernatorial candidate **Andrew Gillum** on the issue in February.

If Corcoran owned a business that employed immigrants, he would understand the concerns raised by IMPAC and ABIC, continued Fernandez. IMPAC and ABIC are coalitions of business leaders supporting pro-immigration policies. They argue it leads to a diversified workforce

beneficial to the overall economy. Former state Republican House Speaker **Allan Bense** and Greenburg Traurig Chairman **Cesar Alvarez** are among key active members in both groups.

On Thursday afternoon, Corcoran, who still has yet to announce a bid for the Governor's Mansion, responded to Fernandez' claim that the Speaker is using misinformation to push a political agenda. He aligned himself with President **Donald Trump** and said he appreciates Fernandez' recognition that he's "the only potential state-wide candidate who is actually standing up against illegal immigration."

"Facts are facts," Corcoran said via a prepared statement sent to Florida Politics from **Fred Piccolo**, the Speaker's communications director. "We need to build the wall, end chain migration, and stop sanctuary cities. I am proud to fight for those policies alongside President Trump and the millions of Florida voters who feel the same way."

Fernandez said he has "personally been told I'm a Southern Liberal" because of his opposition.

"Most of my life I have been a Republican. Most of my life I have given significant contributions to the Republican party," Fernandez said. But he hinted that recent anti-immigration initiatives have caused him to question his party allegiance.

In 2016, **Alex Nowrasteh**, an immigration policy analyst at free-market conservative think tank Cato Institute, wrote: "Many Americans are opposed to mandatory E-Verify not out of some Democratic Party-inspired desire for open borders but rather because they are justifiably skeptical of an error prone, easily fooled, and deceptively expensive federal mandate that has great potential to diminish the privacy of Americans and lead to a national biometric identity program."

Among the key findings from IMPAC and ABIC: Florida employers could lose \$4.7 billion; 1,173,360 legal Florida workers could face job delays or lose their jobs; and a mandated system overburdens small businesses and farm owners with hefty start-up costs, disruption and lost hours.

The report also reflects findings from studies that point to the inefficacy of the federal government's E-verify. Legal foreign-born workers, the groups allege using supporting research from Cato and other sources, are 13 times more likely to be inaccurately disqualified by a mandated system. That number is based on reports from Intel in 2008 when 12 percent of its workforce was deemed unauthorized to work in the U.S., but later received clearance.

The research and conference call Thursday follows a letter last week authored by IMPAC urging commissioners to ax the proposal.

Fernandez said the letter was accompanied with calls to the 19 commissioners who cleared the proposal for drafting in March. But he didn't get a response.

"It is very alarming that we're not hearing a response from them, but we are hopeful that with the general public's involvement and the business community's involvement that [commissioners] understand that this is not an attack on what they're doing, but we are trying to stop an attack on ... free enterprises," Fernandez said.

In March, P29 was cleared for drafting with 19 yes votes. Thirteen commissioners voted against the proposal and five commissioners were absent. To appear on the ballot, it will need the approval of 22 commissioners and will need 60 percent voter approval to pass in November.

The CRC reconvenes Monday to begin final consideration of the proposals.