



THE IMMIGRATION ANSWER By KRIS W. KOBACH

February 13, 2008 -- ON Jan. 1, Arizona became the first state to require all employers to confirm workers' legal status via the federal "E-Verify" system. Having survived a federal court challenge last Thursday, the law promises to transform the immigration crisis in America.

After just six weeks, Arizona's system is already working: Newspapers in the state report that illegals are self-deporting by the thousands. Apartment complexes in Phoenix and Tucson confirm that thousands of tenants have skipped town. Many are returning across the border to Mexico.

This success is proof that attrition through enforcement works. The premise is straightforward: The way to solve our illegal-immigration problem is to ratchet up enforcement while making it more difficult for employers to hire illegals.

Illegal aliens are rational people. If their chance of being able to work illegally goes down, while the chance of getting detained goes up, at some point the only sensible thing to do is go home.

E-Verify is free and easy to use. The employer simply types in the employee's name, date of birth and Social Security number (or other work-authorization number). He gets an answer back from the government in seconds.

More than 20,000 businesses nationwide were using E-Verify voluntarily before Jan. 1. Now Arizona's 145,000 businesses are obliged to join their ranks.

Illegals know that E-Verify makes it impossible for them to fabricate Social Security numbers and use fake IDs to obtain jobs. And when the jobs dry up, they leave.

But Arizona isn't the only compelling proof that attrition through enforcement works. We have another case study: the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System.

The US Justice Department implemented the program back in 2002-03, in the wake of 9/11. It required all aliens from al Qaeda-associated countries to report to INS offices to provide fingerprints and register. The non-compliant faced stiff penalties.

Of the nations concerned, Pakistan had the largest number of nationals in the US. NSEERS led directly to the deportation of some 1,500 illegal-alien Pakistanis - and also prompted about 15,000 illegals to *self*-deport.

All this debunks the common claim that America has only two choices - either round up all illegals and send them home; or unjustly grant amnesty to millions of lawbreakers (thereby virtually begging millions more to break the law in the future).

We now know that there's a third option - attrition through enforcement: Give illegals little choice but to self-deport.

This strategy demands no government sweeps or snooping; we need only require employers nationwide to use E-Verify and increase the enforcement of current laws.

Again, Arizona is a case in point. Illegals began pouring out of the state on Jan. 1 - even though no county attorney there will take *any* enforcement action until after March 1. No government official has yet lifted a finger - a credible threat of enforcement is all it took.

Attrition by enforcement has *never* been tried at the national level. Instead, the strategy for the last decade has been "triage": Deport or incarcerate alien criminals, and shut down smugglers - but rarely enforce the law against garden-variety illegals.

That approach, combined with the fact that America has only a few thousand immigration-enforcement agents to cover our nation's entire vast interior, means that most illegals know their chances of being able to work are very high.

Attrition through enforcement would change the behavior of millions of illegal aliens. Even under today's relatively lax enforcement, nearly 200,000 illegals are estimated to exit each year - while more than a million enter. Attrition through enforcement could reverse those numbers.

To have any hope of reducing the number of illegals in this country, our next president must aim for attrition via enforcement. By requiring every US employer in the country to use E-Verify, and significantly ratcheting up enforcement (against *all* illegals), it is possible solve America's illegal-immigration problem.

Kris W. Kobach teaches law at the University of Missouri (Kansas City). In 2001-03, he served as counsel to the US attorney general and was the architect of the NSEERS program. He is also a member of the legal team that defended Arizona's new law in court.