

Floor Statement by Rep. Sam Johnson (R-TX)  
Introduction of the New Employee Verification Act

Madam Speaker, the lure of employment opportunities in the United States has long been acknowledged as a major reason for immigration – both legal and illegal. Those in Congress know I'm for combating illegal immigration. As the Ranking Member on the Social Security Subcommittee I, along with several of my Subcommittee colleagues, offer an important new component in the immigration reform debate.

Employers want, need and deserve a reliable employee verification system and I want to give it to them. Every day, countless immigrants enter our country seeking the economic opportunities that a job in this country has to offer. Many play by the rules, wait their turn, and obtain the proper permission to work. That is called legal immigration and I am all for it.

But when it comes to enforcing the law for those who do not play by the rules, it can't be done. That is because enforcement is based upon a failed system that is prone to both error and fraud. The result is an illegal immigrant population that has swelled by some estimates to over 12 million. This is a path our nation cannot sustain and the American people have rightly demanded action.

The bill we are introducing today is designed to achieve three important objectives: first, ensure a legal workforce; second, safeguard workers' identity; and finally, protect Social Security.

First, this legislation draws upon lessons learned from the past to help guarantee a legal U.S. workforce for the future. The current failed, paper-based I-9 screening process is replaced with an Electronic Employee Verification System, to be known as EEVS. This system would rely on the use of fewer, more secure identity documents and would be built upon the new hire reporting process already existing in each state. This reporting process is used by 90% of employers and was put in place a dozen years ago to track down dead beat dads.

For Americans, work authorization would be confirmed only through the Social Security Administration. This ensures that there is no "Big Brother" law enforcement agency building new databases on law abiding citizens. For non-citizens, work authorization would be confirmed through the Department of Homeland Security that has the databases on visa and immigration status.

Second, the legislation would help safeguard workers' identity. A voluntary system would be created using the latest technology to authenticate and protect a worker's identity. Private sector contractors, certified by the federal government, would authenticate the identity of employees by utilizing existing background-check and document screening tool and then safeguarded the identity through a biometric identifier, such as a finger print or eye scan. The private sector provider would then verify work authorization in EEVS.

Think back to December 2006 and the now widely known Swift and Company raids. Nearly 1,300 workers in six states were arrested, including many in Cactus, Texas. A Swift and Company human resources official testified before a House panel that Swift had willingly

participated in the government's voluntary verification program for Social Security numbers since 1997. This shows the system is broken and must be fixed.

Third, this legislation would protect the Social Security program by preventing wages earned through future unauthorized work from being used to determine benefits. Also the bill would protect the Social Security Administration's primary mission and trust funds by authorizing employment verification only through funds appropriated in advance.

So far, efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation have failed. Today we offer a new way forward for this Congress to discourage unauthorized workers from entering this country illegally to seek work. Ensuring a legal workforce must be a key component of any immigration bill moving through Congress.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to build on this proposal to achieve a bipartisan solution to immigration reform. Thank you Madam Speaker and I yield back.