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145 were arrested in Hyrum immigration raid

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Posted: 2:45 PM- Federal agents who raided a Utah, meat plant yesterday arrested 145 people, officials said today.

Of those arrested in the Utah raid - one of six in different states against Swift & Co. meat processing plants - 31 were arrested on criminal charges and 114 were arrested for immigration violations.

Those with immigration violations will remain detained until they go in front of an immigration judge, who will then determine whether they are removed from the United States. No children in Utah had both parents detained, said an ICE spokeswoman, Nina Pruneda.

In Washington, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff told reporters this morning that the six-state raid on companies employing undocumented workers was part of an 10-month investigation that turned up identity theft and forgery rings across the country.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested 1,282 people in the raids Tuesday for being in the United States illegally. Of the 65 people arrested nationwide on criminal charges, 31 were from Utah.

Chertoff said there was "massive use of document fraud" to support hundreds of undocumented immigrants in obtaining jobs from Swift & Co. meat processing plants. Instead of using made-up identities to obtain jobs at the company, Chertoff said the undocumented workers obtained the identities of U.S. citizens that had been stolen.

"These were not victimless crimes," Chertoff said, citing instances of people using false documents to obtain credit cards, cell phones and even school loans.

Deborah Majoras, the chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission, which has worked with ICE officials on the investigation, said the commission is working to inform those people whose identities may have been stolen and used by the undocumented workers.

Chertoff said Swift, which has denied knowingly hiring illegal workers, went to court to prohibit the raid, but a federal district judge said the effort could go forward.

After being notified it may be employing illegal immigrants, Swift fired some 400 workers who did not have legal documentation or they didn't return to work, according to Julie Myers, assistant secretary of Homeland Security.

Cache County Attorney George Daines said he had filed charges in Logan's 1st District Court against 58 people - all with the same three counts of forgery and one count of identity theft. The charges are all third-degree felonies. He said 27 or so of those people have not yet been captured because they may have received advanced warning.

Daines, who was at the news conference in Washington to promote his partnering with federal agents on the case, said federal investigators had compiled such good evidence against the undocumented workers that he anticipates convictions for all, a short 60 to 90 day jail sentence and deportation.

"It's a slam dunk," he said.

Daines also said his county has 2 percent unemployment and companies are struggling to find workers. Employers don't have all the tools they need to ensure they're complying with immigration laws, he added. "They're doing the best they can."

As for the company, Chertoff said there are no charges being filed against officials of Swift & Co., but federal agents are still investigating and he didn't rule out sanctions later. Daines said he is not currently pursuing charges against company officials.

Chertoff said that initial tips from law enforcement in Iowa prompted the action on Tuesday - which Myers said was the single, largest worksite enforcement action to date - and investigators had found evidence that the company was employing undocumented workers in six of its facilities.

In addition to the Hyrum plant, federal agents raided Swift operations in Cactus, Texas; Grand Island, Neb.; Marshalltown, Iowa; Worthington, Minn.; and at the company headquarters in Greeley, Colo.

The company had been participating in a pilot program with the Department of Homeland Security that would allow the plants to check whether Social Security numbers used by workers were real. But the program did not identify who the number belonged to nor whether the worker was really that person.

Chertoff said that while the pilot program has a weakness, it was a "very, very useful" tool against efforts to use fake Social Security numbers.

Still, he said, "It is not a magic bullet for every problem."

Swift is the world's second-largest processor of fresh beef and pork and has some \$9 billion in annual sales. Operations at the six plants involved in the action were suspended on Tuesday, the company said.

Chertoff said the identification crimes showed the need for a comprehensive reform of the nation's immigration laws, including a guest worker program because these people are coming here for jobs and employers need workers. "We need Congress to act," he said.

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