

By Congressman Steve King

The economic crisis has placed too many families in peril. And while much discussion has focused on big financial firms, massive car companies and other industry giants, too little discussion has focused on the importance of getting people back to work. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 9.5 million Americans are out of work and looking for jobs. It's a staggering figure, and is particularly infuriating when you consider that the Pew Hispanic Center estimates 7 million jobs in this country are held by illegal immigrants.

Enforcement actions against employers, like the one in Postville, are a step in the right direction. But with so many people working illegally in the United States, we need new tools to enforce the law. It's for precisely this reason that I introduced New IDEA, the Illegal Deduction Elimination Act in 2007. The measure also was introduced as part of the Secure Borders FIRST (For Integrity, Reform, Safety and Anti-Terrorism) Act of 2007. The bills are in committee.

It's the first new idea in immigration enforcement in awhile, and accomplishes key goals that make sense in good economic times, and are crucial in tough ones: New IDEA brings the aggressive and effective IRS into the illegal-immigrant enforcement arena, helps shut off the jobs magnet for illegal immigrants, opens up jobs for the unemployed, reinforces the rule of law and gives the IRS new tools to raise revenue.

These goals are accomplished with just three small but important changes to current law:

- First, New IDEA makes wages and benefits paid to illegal immigrants nondeductible for federal income-tax purposes. New IDEA signals how serious the federal government is about cracking down on illegal labor and leveling the playing field for law-abiding employers. The message should be clear: Our government isn't going to subsidize hiring workers who are here illegally by allowing unscrupulous businesses to break the law and then claim a tax write-off for their efforts.

- Second, New IDEA gives employers "safe harbor" if they use the E-Verify

program to confirm employment eligibility of their workers. E-Verify is an online system employers can use to check their employees to make sure they are legally authorized to work. E-Verify is free, voluntary and the best way to be sure new hires are legal and have valid Social Security numbers. New IDEA improves E-Verify by making the program permanent, and allowing E-Verify to be voluntarily used for existing employees as well as new hires.

-Third, New IDEA requires the IRS, Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security to share information with each other to investigate violations and enforce the law. This gives the IRS the tools it needs to verify whether these workers have valid Social Security numbers, and alerts the Department of Homeland Security of immigration violations. The exchange of information will make the Social Security Administration, DHS and the IRS far more effective.

Passing New IDEA is only one of a number of important things Congress should do this year to help protect American workers and local communities. We must continue to support our state and local law enforcement who are the front line of defense against terrorism and criminal aliens. We must ensure that the Department of Homeland Security remains vigilant and accountable to complete the border fence as Congress has directed. We must continue to support our hard-working Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and officers across the country who, with congressional support, are finally making progress in border and interior enforcement despite years of neglect under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

As 2009 begins, we should keep in our minds the displaced Americans who need work and our children and grandchildren who deserve safe communities. By passing New IDEA as a start, we can start our new year the right way.