

Editorial: Lewisville leader wants to expand E-Verify use

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To better understand our nation's problem enforcing its immigration laws, let's visit our old friends, supply and demand.

Supply is represented by the thousands, if not millions, of people living in distant lands willing to hazard illegal entry into the U.S. to find work. Demand is those employers willing to look the other way, in violation of the law, to hire them.

Supply isn't going away, even in a down economic time. Demand is a legitimate target.

Clearly, this newspaper continues to support a comprehensive overhaul of our immigration laws that provides border security, interior enforcement, a guest-worker program and a reasonable path to legalization. This was the case long before the bitter immigration fight of 2007, which led to little substantive change.

The [Obama](#) administration has sent strong signals that it wants [Congress](#) to try again this year, even in the face of approaching mid-term elections. We are cautiously optimistic, if only for those taxpayers and companies trapped in an unworkable system but still trying to do the right thing.

One right thing is to use E-Verify, a federally maintained electronic database of Social Security and other records. Employers can access the system to check the immigration status of workers or prospective hires. Legal challenges and legislative timidity have kept E-Verify from becoming a mandate, despite a success rate of better than 96 percent and increasingly small percentage of errors.

Here in North [Texas](#), Lewisville City Council member John Gorena is tired of waiting. Lewisville already uses E-Verify to clear city employees for paychecks, and Gorena wants to extend that to any contractors the city hires. "Our tax dollars should go to those companies that are doing their due diligence," he says.

Expanding the use of E-Verify to limit employers' use of illegal immigrant labor makes sense, unless you favor the shadowy underground labor market we have today. Lewisville's city staff is researching Gorena's proposal, with further discussion scheduled for a Feb. 4-6 retreat.

Other city officials have reasonable questions about the details. How far would the measure go? Would this ultimately bar the city from shopping with local retailers who decline to use E-Verify? Would it place Lewisville at a competitive disadvantage as the only Texas city so restricting its contractor pool?

No North Texas city wants to face the divisive battles made infamous in Farmers Branch, another [Dallas](#) suburb that attempted to step in where federal immigration law failed. Gorena says he's less concerned about that than making sure Lewisville is doing all it can for its residents.

For our part, we're confident smart staffers in Gorena's city can fill in the details and help craft an ordinance that would accomplish his goal – minimizing the hiring of illegal workers – while protecting the city from undue liability.

In the absence of federal reform, a city like Lewisville will have to take the first step, perhaps leading to a longer-range solution like the Legislature passing a law that forbids Texas municipalities and school districts from using contractors who failed to E-Verify their workers.

From city to state to the halls of Congress and – who knows? – perhaps one day a true overhaul of our nation's immigration laws. We can dream, can't we?

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