

New ICE raid snares 193

12 Denver janitors among those arrested at corporate-run eateries

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Federal agents forged ahead with their crackdown on employers who hire illegal foreign workers - raiding 63 entertainment-eateries around the country and arresting 193 janitors supplied by a national cleaning contractor.

The raids on corporate-run chain restaurants - cultural icons including ESPN Zone, Dave & Busters, and Hard Rock Cafe - netted the arrest of 12 janitors in the Denver area, authorities announced Thursday.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents also arrested three owners of the cleaning company - Nevada-based Rosenbaum-Cunningham International Inc. - accusing them of evading \$18 million in payroll taxes and using the money to buy boats, vehicles, racehorses, fancy homes and education for their kids.

If convicted, the owners - Florida residents - could face up to 10 years in prison and restitution to the government.

This case shows "how some employers try to beat the system and their competition by hiring illegal workers," said Jeff Copp, ICE district chief based in Denver. "Bypassing immigration, tax and labor laws are serious crimes that will be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

The names, nationalities and locations of detained janitors weren't released. Immigrant-rights advocates urged ICE agents to ensure humane treatment for families so that children returning from school wouldn't be alone. Colorado activists planned to gather downtown at El Centro Humanitario para los Trabajadores on Thursday night to pray for worker families and call for a moratorium on raids.

The corporate-run restaurants that hired RCI to perform janitorial services weren't targeted.

"We're looking for a new company for janitorial services," ESPN Zone spokeswoman Christine Baum said.

The Wednesday-Thursday crackdown, shortly before Congress debates immigration, follows high-profile raids Dec. 12 that targeted workers at Swift & Co. meatpacking plants in Colorado and five other states.

ICE officials say they're escalating worksite enforcement to remove the jobs magnet that has drawn an estimated 8 million illegal foreign workers.

"There are a number of industries ... that hire illegal aliens blatantly almost as part of their

business practices," ICE spokesman Marc Raimondi said in Washington, D.C.

While companies that used RCI janitors weren't targeted, all U.S. companies ought to be checking their contractors, asking to review worker documents, Raimondi said.

This won't insulate companies but could help keep them on the right side of the law, he said.

"Most businesses want to do the right thing," he said.

Now immigration analysts, who are tracking recent raids, are considering where continued robust immigration enforcement might lead.

"What Americans will find is they don't have as clean an environment to munch their burgers and fries," said Crystal Williams, deputy director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, a pro-immigration group in Washington.

The eateries that employed RCI janitors "are going to find it hard to replace the people who were removed," Williams said. "There's a need for these workers."

"As they do more raids, we will find people we take for granted, who do work we don't do, are bit by bit disappearing," Williams said. "If ICE keeps on enforcing, and Congress doesn't do anything to ensure there's a legal flow of workers, we're going to have worker shortages in a lot of the service industries."

Another possibility: Employers might have to pay higher wages.

"I don't have any official numbers to draw from," Colorado Department of Labor and Employment senior economist Joseph Winter said. "But if the raids are effective enough to dissuade lower-priced workers from coming into the state, it may have some effect on wages."

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