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Editorial

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Title: **[Not Very Swift Meatpacking raids, Mitt Romney and other immigration follies](#)**

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At his press conference Wednesday, President Bush alluded to last week's federal raids on Swift meatpacking plants to round up suspected illegal immigrant employees. "It just reminded me that the system we have in place has caused people to rely upon smugglers and forgers in order to do work Americans aren't doing," Mr. Bush said. We hope the incoming Members of Congress were listening.

Among its other shortcomings, the departing Republican Congress failed to do anything substantive to address the nation's illegal immigration problem, which is primarily a labor shortage problem. As a result, businesses and state officials continue to fend for themselves with piecemeal solutions that only underscore the need for reform that would allow willing immigrant workers to fill jobs that otherwise go begging.

Immigration restrictionists would have us believe that harassing businesses like Swift, the world's second-largest beef and pork processor, helps make America safer. But so far the Swift raids haven't uncovered any al Qaeda cells, merely a bunch of hard-working people trying to feed their families. The operation involved more than 1,000 federal agents in six states. And of Swift's 15,000 or so employees, a grand total of 144 have been charged to date with misidentifying themselves to get hired.

Put another way, 1,000 federal agents that could have been focused on potential terrorists or other dangerous threats were instead focused on a meatpacking company that hires thousands of willing unskilled workers and pays them more than twice the minimum wage with full health benefits after six months. How's that for government efficiency?

There's a common notion that businesses seek out illegal aliens to employ. So it's also worth noting that since 1997 Swift has voluntarily participated in a government program for vetting new hires known as Basic Pilot. Under this system, the names and Social Security numbers of all job applicants are checked against a federal database. Which is to say that the presence of illegal workers at Swift is not the result of a company's indifference to the rule of law. It's the result of a flawed government system for determining who's eligible to work here. A few years ago Swift's management attempted to go even further than Basic Pilot to screen job applicants, only to be sued

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