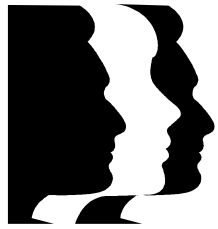


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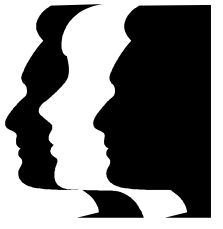


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## Local Businesses Hurt By Illegals

Building contractors say illegal immigrants undercutting wages are throwing Americans out of work.

By Tonya Brantley  
Managing Editor

In last month's issue of *The People News*, it was mentioned that many feel Cleveland, TN has become a sanctuary city where illegal immigrants can commit crimes without fear of prosecution. At a recent Bradley County Commission meeting, Jerry Chess, a subcontractor in the county was another concerned citizen who took to the podium to voice his concerns. He said that the illegal immigration problem seems to

be getting out of hand, but it wasn't so much the illegal immigrants that are creating the problem, his problem is with the builders and the homeowners trying to get the bottom dollar by hiring illegal aliens. He estimates that he has lost approximately 65 percent of his business just this year because of illegal immigration. Mr. Chess asked the commission what can be done to find a resolution to this problem.

Masonry contractor, Troy Smith also addressed commissioners saying that he had

called the Bradley County Sheriff's Department trying to get some information about what could be done. They informed him that they had never been asked that question.

Commissioner Howard Thompson said the commission has talked to our legislators about this, however, he doesn't think that they are moving fast enough in Nashville or Washington to take care of these problems. He said, "Locally I have no idea what we can do, but it needs to start on a state level."

Commissioner Brian Smith

informed Jerry Chess and Troy Smith that the city has a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent and that she has an office here in Cleveland. He said, "I think the ICE agent can help answer a whole lot of questions about what can be done. Since she's the federal agent, that's who should be enforcing the law anyway."

It took several attempts by this paper to contact local ICE agent Brenda Dixon. When we first called the Cleveland City Police Department, we were told she did not have a direct line. The city official with this information said they had only seen Agent Dixon one time and that she spends the majority of her time in Chattanooga. After numerous attempts, we finally contacted her at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs in Chattanooga. Agent Dixon said that she was not allowed to be contacted for press purposes and that she had points of contact that handle such questions. However, she said, those points of contact are not local and they would more than likely not be aware of problems that are going on in Cleveland and Bradley County.

Some local effort is being taken to deport illegal aliens with the recent news of the Bradley County Sheriff's Office joining the Federal Criminal Alien Program (CAP) offered by ICE. The Criminal Alien Removal Act of 2008 directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to carry out a program to identify incarcerated criminal aliens, ensure that such aliens are not released back into the commu-

nity and to remove such aliens from the United States upon release. The criminal alien program allows the correction staff at the Bradley County Jail's booking office to check the immigration status of all new inmates.

Chief Deputy Bill Dyer said if the BCSO suspects that the person being booked is here illegally, their information will be sent to ICE. If ICE cannot verify that the person is legal, the BCSO will hold them until ICE picks them up and departs them. If they can be identified as illegal before they can make bond, they will still be held, even after they have paid their bond, until immigration and customs enforcement departs them. Under the law, federal authorities have 48 hours to pick them up and begin deportation proceedings. Since the beginning of this year, the BCSO has identified 37 incarcerated individuals as illegal aliens and turned them over to ICE for deportation.

In a recent press release Sheriff Tim Gobble said he is still interested in the federal 287g program which would allow his department an even greater ability to identify illegal aliens and deal with the illegal alien problem. According to Chief Deputy Bill Dyer, if the Bradley County Sheriff's Office gets accepted into the 287g program it would allow them to deputize their people as federal immigration officers. "In other words, they would become custom enforcement agents."

Just before going to press, new information was received by the *The People News* in regards to the 287g program.

After getting what was described as the run around on this program from the federal government, Agent William Black, the 287g Program Coordinator with Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New Orleans, Louisiana contacted Chief Deputy Bill Dyer to see what he could do to help the BCSO get into the 287g program.

The BCSO's requests to apply for the 287g program have been overlooked for over two years. After sending numerous requests to apply for the 287g program, Chief Deputy Dyer was elated to receive some acknowledgement. He said, "I finally feel that they (ICE) are taking us seriously when it comes to our request for the BCSO to be part of this program."

Out of 95 counties in the state of Tennessee, only one, Davidson County, is certified to be part of the 287g program. The Tennessee Highway Patrol is also certified."

Many city and county officials agree that it is the federal government's responsibility to address illegal immigration. Commissioner Ed Elkins said, "If employers were not giving jobs to these illegal people, then they wouldn't be here. That's the only reason they're here is because somebody is willing to hire them." He went on to say, "They are violating the law just as much as the illegal person."

Commissioner Roy Smith requested that the commission meet with legislators at an upcoming work session to see what they can do to resolve this problem.



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