E-Verify Threatens Us All

In addition to funding for a border wall and other border security measures, immigration hardliners are sure to push to include mandatory E-Verify in any immigration legislation considered by Congress. E-Verify is a (currently) voluntary program where businesses check job applicants' Social Security numbers and other Information — potentially including "biometric" identifiers like fingerprints — against information stored in a federal database to determine if the job applicants are legally in the United States.
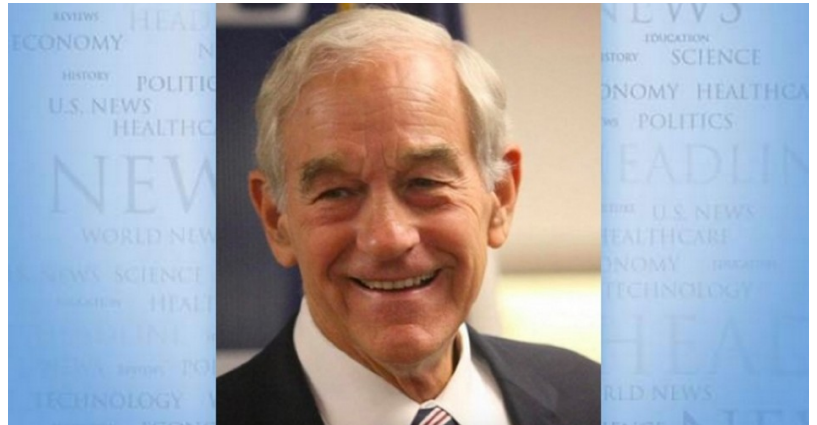
Imagine how much time would be diverted from serving consumers and growing the economy if every US business had to comply with E-Verify. Also, collecting the relevant information and operating the mandatory E-Verify system will prove costly to taxpayers.

Millions of Americans could be denied jobs because E-Verify mistakenly identifies them as illegal immigrants. These Americans would be forced to go through a costly and time-consuming process to force the government to correct its mistake. It is doubtful employers could afford to keep jobs open while potential hires went through this process.

A federal database with Social Security numbers and other identifying information is an identify thief's dream. Given the federal government's poor track record for protecting personal information, is there any doubt mandatory E-Verify would put millions of Americans at risk for identity theft?

Some supporters of E-Verify deny the program poses any threat to civil liberties, as it will only be used to verify citizenship or legal residency. They even claim a system forcing individuals to have their identities certified by the government is not a national ID system. These individuals are ignoring the history of government programs sold as only affecting a particular group or being used for a limited purpose being expanded beyond initial targets. For example, Americans were promised that only the wealthiest Americans would ever pay income taxes. And some of the PATRIOT Act's worst provisions that we were told would only be used against terrorists are routinely used to investigate drug crimes.

E-Verify almost certainly will be used for purposes unrelated to immigration. One potential use of E-Verify is to limit the job prospects of anyone whose lifestyle displeases the government. This could include those accused of failing to pay their fair share in taxes, those who homeschool or do not vaccinate their children, or those who own firearms.

Unscrupulous government officials could use E-Verify against those who practice antiwar, anti-tax, anti-surveillance, and anti-Federal Reserve activism. Those who consider this unlikely should remember the long history of the IRS targeting the political enemies of those in power and the use of anti-terrorism laws to harass antiwar activists. They should also consider the current moves to outlaw certain types of "politically incorrect" speech, such as disputing the alleged "consensus" regarding climate change.

Claiming that mandatory E-Verify is necessary to stop illegal immigration does not make it

constitutional. Furthermore, having to ask the federal government for permission before obtaining a job is a characteristic of authoritarian societies, not free ones. History shows that mandatory E-Verify's use will expand beyond immigration enforcement and could be used as a tool of political repression. All those who value liberty should oppose mandatory E-Verify.

Ron Paul is a former U.S. congressman from Texas. This article originally appeared at the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity and is reprinted here with permission.

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