



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 19, 2011

Romney Proposes National ID Card

At [last week's debate](#), Romney announced his idea for dealing with the more than 11 million illegal immigrants currently living in the United States in defiance of applicable federal and state laws.

On stage in Sioux City, Romney laid out for Republicans his plan for a national identification card system to distinguish between those here without permission and those legally permitted to live and work in the United States.

As an additional protection against encouraging further illegal entrance, Romney proposed an expansion of the E-Verify program, which requires employers to investigate the immigration status of potential workers.



In October [at a town hall meeting in Sioux City, Iowa](#), Romney addressed the role he envisions the federal government playing in preventing businesses from hiring those without proper work visas.

You've got to crack down on employers that hire people that are illegal, and that means you have to have a system that identifies who's here legally, with a biometric card that has: this is the person, they're allowed to work here. You say to an employer, you look at that card, you swipe it in your computer, you type in the number, it instantly tells you whether they're legal or not.

What, one may ask, is so offensive about a plan to issue ID cards to immigrants that would aid employers in avoiding fines imposed by the federal government for hiring illegals? After all, the cards would have the concomitant effect of preventing illegal aliens from taking jobs they are legally prevented from holding.

Jim Harper at [the Cato Institute](#) sees the program's potential for misuse and for government overreaching:

Like the Social Security number did when it caught mission creep, the national ID Romney talks about would come to be used to control access to housing, to financial services and credit, gun ownership, health care and medicine, the list goes on and on.

It's technically possible to have a biometric card that solely indicates one's qualification to work under federal law, but as I wrote in my paper, "Franz Kafka's Solution to Illegal Immigration," there is almost no chance that the government would limit itself this way. E-Verify requires a national identity system, and Mitt Romney wants that national identity system.

Romney's roster of regulations would, says the candidate, pressure illegals to return back across the border to "voluntarily" conform to the new immigration policy that would place them at the "back of the line" of those seeking legal entry into the United States.



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As Romney explained at the debate:

You say to people who are here illegally today, you are not going to be able to work here unless you register, unless — and we will give you [a] transition period of time, and then ultimately you have got to go home, apply for permanent residency here or citizenship, if you want to try and do that, but get in line behind everyone else.

The Romney plan relies on the twin beliefs in bureaucracy and the secret desire of those currently living, working, and thriving in the United States without permission to burn all of that on the altar of following proper procedure, even if that means returning to their native countries and waiting years to resume a life that they've invested so much time and money building.

Pro-immigrant advocacy groups recognize the naiveté in the Romney scheme, as well. "The touch-back concept is a stimulus program for Greyhound. The concept of getting in line is valuable and necessary, but really what's needed is the creation of a line for undocumented immigrants who are contributing to our economy," said Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum Action Fund.

Some very valuable information demonstrating the difficulty of the Romney demands was provided in a recent article on the subject [published online by ABC News](#):

Seventy percent of illegal immigrants have lived in the U.S. 10 years or more and many have families (with U.S. citizen children) and roots to organizations in their communities, according to the Pew Research Center.

How many of those families would uproot their lives and leave the country if Romney's plan were implemented is speculation. Romney has said, however, that he does not think government should "go through a process of tracking them all down and moving them out."

How, then, the question remains, will the number of illegal immigrants already present in the United States be reduced? Is that Romney's goal? Perhaps he intends merely to stanch the flow of illegals across the southern border, while expanding and empowering government to manage those currently living here in defiance of the law.

In 2006, Romney assured voters that it was not his policy to have illegal immigrants "[rounded up and boxcarred out.](#)"

Not quite the firm commitment the illegal immigrant lobby needs from a presidential candidate.

"Romney and the other candidates are in many ways trying — advocating both sides of the coin. On the one hand they're saying they don't want to deport 11 million people, but they really want 11 million people to leave the country," said Noorani.

Romney's plan has its proponents, however. Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies, an advocacy group that favors strengthened enforcement of the nation's immigration laws, said Romney's plan would be a positive step forward, even if it required some "reading between the lines." He added,

What he means is consistent enforcement of the law so people leave, or at least some significant share of the people leave. His point is you can't dangle amnesty in front of people if you're going to get some significant share of the population to give up and go home. And implicit in that, frankly, is that some point down the road you might talk about it.

As for how many of the 11 million might return voluntarily under a Romney policy to take a number for the 10-15 year wait for a visa, we don't know for sure, but how about let's give it a try.



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Not everyone is so keen on rolling the dice on Romney's plan. As [reported by the *Washington Post*](#), leaders of the influential Hispanic bloc of the Republican electorate are anxious to muzzle the would-be nominee on the immigration issue.

The leaders of ... the Hispanic Leadership Fund are so upset with Romney that if he wins the nomination, they might withhold an endorsement and curtail plans for an extensive voter-contact campaign in Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Florida to bolster the GOP presidential ticket.

The *Post* quotes the president of the Hispanic Leadership Fund as saying, "Romney's tin ear on this topic, on immigration, will hurt him should he be the nominee, is hurting the Republican Party and is hurting every conservative who cares about passing conservative legislation in the future."

From the issue of national identification cards to the expansion of the E-Verify system, Mitt Romney sees bigger government as the panacea for the illegal immigration crisis, and likely for many other problems as well.



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