

Opinion : NC Sheriffs Still Reporting Illegals
Lincoln Tribune
November 27, 2009

By Jeff Mixon

Despite recent efforts by the federal government to restrain local law enforcement from using the 287 (g) program to identify illegal aliens for deportation, North Carolina sheriffs are still reporting the presence of illegal aliens who are booked in their jail. The program was created under U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and provides state and local law enforcements with training on how to identify, process, and when appropriate detain immigration offenders they encounter during their regular, daily law-enforcement activity.

In August, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security sent a revised agreement with 12 changes to its participating agencies. The new guidelines have been viewed, by several press accounts, as tying the sheriffs' hands from reporting illegal aliens for deportation, which was the foundation of the 287 (g) program.

Regardless, North Carolina sheriffs continue to identify and report illegal aliens who come through their jails no matter what they are charged. Currently, seven sheriff's departments in North Carolina participate in the 287 (g) program: Alamance, Cabarrus, Cumberland, Gaston, Henderson, Mecklenburg and Wake counties, as well as the Durham Police Department.

The media has been peddling one story after another seemingly designed to show how the 287 (g) program has "torn families apart" and how illegals are being deported for minor traffic violations. These stories, while one sided, ignore the simple fact that people who break our immigration laws choose to do so. Children of illegal immigrants are often the focus of a deportation story in the press and it is told in a way that their plight is a modern tale of injustice. Unfortunately, the anger directed at North Carolina sheriffs, who are being profiled as sadistic lawmen without compassion, is misdirected. Rather, it is the parents of illegal aliens who are the real villains. They made the choice to break American law and to compound it by dragging their children into it as well.

The complaints about illegals being deported for minor traffic charges are also misguided. It is fair to say that just about every citizen of North Carolina has had at least one encounter with the law over a traffic violation. But how many of us have been arrested and taken to jail for minor traffic charges? Arrests with a resulting trip to the jail occur only when an officer cannot establish a person's identity, the person has outstanding warrants for previously unresolved charges or they constitute an immediate threat to public safety (such as drunk driving).

While the left complains that 287 (g) is used to "hunt down" illegals, keep in mind that in North Carolina, the only people being reviewed under the program are people who are already in our jails. A recent story in the Raleigh News and Observer included arrest data for Wake County that provides much needed insight to how 287 (g) actually works.

During a 10-month period (Jan 2009 to Oct. 2009), 1,735 illegal aliens were processed by the Wake County Sheriff's Office. Of those, 809 were for non-alcohol related traffic offenses, 506 were for drunk driving, 203 were for drug offenses, 153 were for larceny, 102 were for domestic violence, 43 were for weapons offenses, 43 were for sex offenses and 10 were for murder. These numbers were nicely laid out in a chart that had the minor traffic offenses at the top, while the rest of the charges were tabulated in descending order by occurrence.

A casual glance at the information may lead the reader to conclude that the overwhelming majority of illegals processed for deportation by the Wake County Jail were for minor traffic offenses. But look at the numbers. Traffic offenses (not involving alcohol) account for less than half of the number when compared to the other charges, nearly all of which are felonies. Spare us the woes of the children – these are grown up crimes.

On the contrary, the 287 (g) program has not been cut and is doing quite well in North Carolina. Our sheriffs deserve the credit (well, at least seven of them do). It is important to consider that 10 accused murderers won't be on the loose in Wake County as a result of 287 (g) program.

Jeff Mixon is a Legislative Analyst with the Civitas Institute in Raleigh, NC. He began his career on the staff of Congressman David Funderburk (N.C.) and has served as a campaign consultant on federal, state and local campaigns in North Carolina and Virginia . He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, with duty in the Submarine Force and Marine Corps. Mixon joined the Civitas Institute after leaving the Department of Homeland Security's Gulf Coast Recovery Office. A native of Durham, Mixon is an alumnus of North Carolina Central University.