

Congressional quota drives US immigration detentions to record highs

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A US congressional directive known as the “bed mandate” requires that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold an average 34,000 immigrants in custody per day. Under this congressional directive, the number of immigrants being jailed and deported has reached record highs over the past five years.

Established in 2006, this quota has been raised steadily by Congress. According to a recent report on the mandate in the *Washington Post*, the ICE has increasingly resorted to the detention of foreign-born legal US residents as crossings of undocumented immigrants have hit their lowest levels since the 1970s. “The agency also has greatly expanded the number of undocumented immigrants it takes into custody after traffic stops by local police,” the *Post* states.

Department of Homeland Security officials claim that they are only targeting those who pose a threat to public safety and border security. In fact, hundreds of thousands of immigrants are being deported every year on the basis of a grossly undemocratic policy.

A comment published in the *Wall Street Journal* on Monday (“The Giant US Deportation Machine Runs Amok”) notes, “At last count, ICE was deporting over 1,000 people a day—more than 400,000 a year.” Moreover, the *Journal*, states, “In the last fiscal year, the Transactional Record Access Clearinghouse [TRAC] reports, less than 14.5% of those hauled into immigration court were either criminals or suspected terrorists.” In the first six months of 2013, this figure had fallen to just over 10 percent.

The TRAC Immigration Project has found that within the past 16 months, nearly 48 percent of the 350,000 immigrants that were transferred over to ICE through local jails (after receiving an “ICE detainer”) had no criminal convictions or traffic violations at all, according to the *Post*.

Because of the “bed mandate,” for-profit private detention centers have been awarded handsome contracts through ICE that guarantee the detention centers minimum-occupancy payments, thus ensuring payment even if beds go unused.

Two such companies, Florida-based GEO group and Tennessee-based Corrections Corp. of America, “Have been won hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of ICE contracts in recent years while lobbying Congress on immigration issues,” the *Post* notes. In 2012 alone, CCA reported profits of over \$156.8 million while GEO reported \$134 million.

Spending on immigration detention has soared under the Obama administration, to \$2.6 billion a year, twice what it was in 2006. During the sequestration debates in April, House Republicans ordered ICE to spend nearly \$400 million in addition to what the agency had requested.

According to the *Post*, there are some Congressmen who are looking to the agency for possible budget cutting. Their proposals, however, are no less draconian—suggesting that the jailing of some immigrants be replaced with greater use of ankle bracelets and electronic monitoring.

The Obama administration has overseen a dramatic expansion of anti-immigrant measures. In its first term of office, the administration set a new record of 1.5 million deportations. At the current rate of 1,000 deportations per day, Obama will greatly surpass George W. Bush’s record of 2 million deportations over the course of his two terms in office.

The Senate-approved “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” backed by the Democratic Party, seeks to appropriate \$46 billion for border enforcement, under conditions where ICE is already the largest federal police agency.

The aim is to establish 100 percent surveillance of the southern border, with unmanned aerial drones deployed on a 24/7 basis.

With the end of the government shutdown, Obama is urging House Republicans to take up the bill, where even more draconian measures are likely to be added.



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