

Trump administration announces, then rescinds, pilot program offering ICE agents bonuses for quick deportations

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In a chilling demonstration of the accelerating authoritarianism of the Trump administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced—and then rapidly rescinded—a pilot bonus program offering cash rewards to agents for deporting immigrants within as little as seven days of arrest.

The program, revealed in an internal email Tuesday morning, promised \$200 bonuses for deportations completed within a week and \$100 for those completed within two weeks. The intent was to increase the use of “expedited removal,” a fast-track process that denies immigrants access to legal representation, the right to a hearing and the most minimal legal protections.

By Tuesday afternoon, ICE was forced to cancel the program, sending out an internal follow-up email marked in capital letters: “PLEASE DISREGARD.” The sudden reversal came only after inquiries from the *New York Times*, revealing that the plan had not been an offhand suggestion but had reached the level of signed internal memoranda.

This brief but revealing episode cannot be dismissed as a bureaucratic error or public relations blunder. On the contrary, it illuminates the trajectory of the Trump administration’s far-right, anti-immigrant policy and the broader turn of the American ruling class toward authoritarianism. The mere fact that such a program was devised, approved and internally circulated underscores a political climate in which unconstitutional and illegal acts are not only contemplated but actively prepared by state agencies.

The ICE bonus scheme is a grotesque manifestation of the administration’s effort to transform the immigration enforcement apparatus into a shock force of political repression. Its underlying logic is clear: reduce the number of immigrants with access to legal recourse, increase deportation quotas by any means necessary and financially incentivize agents to circumvent even the pretense of due process.

The language of the internal memo makes clear the Trump administration’s priorities: the program, the memo said, would help “reduce overall removal costs and decrease strain on detention resources.” In practice, this meant eliminating

procedural barriers and encouraging ICE agents to push detainees into so-called “voluntary departure”—a coercive measure cloaked in euphemism.

A former senior Department of Homeland Security official, Scott Shuchart, captured the gravity of the plan’s implications: “That is so ungodly unethical. You can’t incentivize government agents to short-circuit people’s procedural rights. Would you pay a bonus to judges for wrapping up trials faster?”

But that, in effect, is precisely what this program was designed to do: monetize the deportation process, reward constitutional violations and spur ICE agents to eject immigrants from the country in the shortest possible time.

The use of financial incentives to drive repression has deep historical precedents, each with dire consequences.

In the 19th-century American West, bounty hunters were paid cash rewards for capturing or killing fugitives, creating a violent marketplace in which justice was secondary to profit. The ICE bonus program similarly encourages speed and numbers over law and humanity. As with the bounty system, moral and legal considerations are subordinated to quotas, targets and personal advancement.

A more dystopian echo can be drawn from Suzanne Collins’s novel *The Hunger Games*, in which the state orchestrates deadly competition for rewards, turning violence into a contest that serves the regime’s goals. ICE’s bonus plan resembles this “gamification” of enforcement: agents are rewarded not so much for their job performance, as for how quickly they can carry out acts of repression, treating human lives as little more than entries in a scorecard.

In political terms, the clearest historical parallel lies in the methods of fascist regimes during the 1920s and 1930s. In Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany, ultranationalism and xenophobia were used to mobilize state agencies against so-called internal enemies.

Bureaucracies were reshaped to act quickly and ruthlessly, offering promotions, medals and privileges to those who most zealously carried out the regime’s will. The ICE bonus program—while not equivalent in scale—echoes these methods:

rewarding loyalty, punishing hesitation and discarding democratic rights in favor of coercion and outright brutality.

The broader context makes the implications even more dangerous. In July, Trump signed his signature domestic legislation expanding ICE's annual budget from \$8 billion to a staggering \$28 billion—making it the single most heavily funded law enforcement agency in the country. The bill also authorized the hiring of 10,000 new agents, with signing bonuses of up to \$50,000, and launched a national recruitment campaign soaked in militaristic and fascist language.

“Want to mass deport illegals from Los Angeles?” read a social media post by Trump adviser Stephen Miller, who has long been the ideological architect of Trump's anti-immigrant crusade. “JOIN.ICE.GOV today and get a 50K signing/retention bonus. Make your family proud and be the hero America needs.”

Though the bonus program was officially rescinded, the Department of Homeland Security continues to promote the JOIN.ICE.GOV initiative on social media, underscoring that the campaign for mass deportations is still very much under way. Far from retreating, ICE is intensifying its activity.

Department of Homeland Security thugs hid in back of Penske truck prior to Los Angeles raid at Home Depot

Only days after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a temporary restraining order barring federal agents from stopping people without reasonable suspicion and from relying solely on factors like their race, place and type of work, or location to detain people, dozens of immigration police were spotted at the Home Depot in Westlake/MacArthur Park—scene of a massive military operation in July—using rented yellow Penske box trucks in their kidnapping operations. DHS claimed in a statement after the raid that 16 people were taken.

The move drew widespread outrage due to its eerie similarity to the tactics of the neo-fascist group Patriot Front, which also uses such trucks to conceal the movement of its members during demonstrations. The public outcry was so intense that Penske was forced to issue a public statement disavowing any collaboration with DHS, stating that it “strictly prohibits the transportation of people in the cargo area of its vehicles.”

This militarized and deceptive strategy signals a further descent into domestic repression. The use of unmarked vehicles for detentions recalls the “black bag” tactics used during the Portland, Oregon protests of 2020 and reveals an agency unconstrained by law or public accountability. That the raid took place just days after the 9th Circuit's ruling underscores that the working class cannot rely on capitalist state institutions, including the courts, to defend democratic rights.

Workers at the Federal Emergency Management Agency are

also being drawn into the deportation apparatus. On Wednesday multiple outlets reported that over 100 staff—nearly half its HR division and key security personnel— have been reassigned to assist ICE in hiring 10,000 new agents under Trump's “One Big Beautiful Bill.”

These 90-day reassignments come during peak hurricane season and amid multiple disasters, including historic Texas flooding. Department of Government Efficiency cuts have left FEMA short 2,000 staff. Officials warn that delays in processing local hires and security clearances are undermining disaster response.

The use of personnel funded by the Disaster Relief Fund to support ICE—far outside FEMA's mission—diverts vital resources from lifesaving work to repressive operations. This shift threatens FEMA's ability to address natural catastrophes effectively while exposing how “national priorities” are being used to justify authoritarian restructuring.

DHS's defense of the move, couched in vague slogans, underscores a dangerous transformation: agencies nominally tasked to assist civilians in emergency situations are being repurposed to serve a state apparatus centered on mass deportations and domestic repression.

The attack on immigrant workers is a spearhead for a broader assault on the entire working class. The structures being built—quotas, incentives and militarized policing—will be used to crush strikes, suppress protests and silence dissent.

ICE and the National Guard have already monitored demonstrations and surveilled activists, while FEMA's conversion into an ICE recruiting arm underscores how state agencies are being repurposed for repression. Anti-immigrant hysteria is a tool to divide workers and distract from deepening social crisis while the ruling class siphons their wealth to create the machinery of war and dictatorship.

This threat can only be countered by a conscious, unified struggle of the working class against the capitalist system.



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