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Culver expresses support for crackdown

By CHARLOTTE EBY, Courier Des Moines Bureau

DES MOINES --- Iowa Gov. Chet Culver has formed a working group of top state officials to help the community of Postville after a raid on its meatpacking plant by federal immigration officials Monday.

Culver announced the action at a news conference Monday, just hours after officials descended on kosher meatpacker Agriprocessors. He expressed support for going after employers who hire illegal workers and in some cases, exploit them.

Culver said his office was informed last week of the pending federal action and was notified once it was in progress.

"I have said before that I believe it is important that we crack down on illegal immigration," Culver said. "Illegal means illegal, not just those who are crossing the border illegally, but also those who are responsible for helping to make it happen --- traffickers, identity thieves, those who knowingly hire illegal immigrants and anyone who has taken advantage of employees or turned a blind eye."

Culver said at the same time, officials must make sure to protect the rights of the accused and ensure they are afforded due process.

"My administration has made it clear to the federal government the importance of ensuring the humanitarian side of this exercise is addressed, and I have received assurances from the federal government that they are doing so," Culver said.

State officials from various departments will work to assist Postville in dealing with action, Culver announced.

"While this is a federal exercise, my office will continue to keep the public and the press informed of any additional state involvement," Culver pledged.

If criminal activity at the state level is discovered, Culver said the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation is prepared to step in.

"Most importantly, we want to enforce the federal law and the state law and hold those accountable for any illegal activity," Culver said.

He said he was "very troubled" by the allegations.

"That does not reflect well on Iowa businesses. So any criminal activity that is taking place by an Iowa business, allegedly in this case, is not a good signal, and I think those involved should be held accountable," Culver said.

Iowa lawmakers this year considered measures to try to crack down on employers who hired illegal

immigrants but ultimately failed to get one passed through both chambers before they adjourned for the year in April.

The Postville raid and ICE actions "highlight once again the need for comprehensive immigration reform," said Dubuque Archbishop Jerome Hanus. "Families have been disrupted; parents and children are filled with fear. Many are uncertain whether their loved ones will be arrested, imprisoned indefinitely or deported."

The Dubuque archdiocese covers the northeast quadrant of Iowa and includes Postville.

"This state of terror for families is evidence that our political system has not adequately addressed the demand for labor, the inadequacies of our present immigration policies and practices, and the broader economic challenges," the archbishop said.

"Some of the weakest members among us are bearing the brunt of the suffering, while legislators and other leaders, as well as many of us in the general public, have failed to give this issue the priority that it deserves," Hanus said.