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Editorial; ICE learned from past human rights miscues

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EDITORIAL: ICE learned from past human rights miscues

It's clear that Immigration and Customs Enforcement has learned a few lessons since the December 2006 raids of the Swift & Company plants at six locations, including one in Marshalltown.

At that time, about 90 Swift workers were detained, and several were taken to Camp Dodge in Johnston and held in military barracks.

Unions, community organizations and local officials had criticized ICE's handling of the raids back then, specifically for separating children from their families.

Then-Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack sent letters to President Bush and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, complaining about how the issue was handled.

In comparison, ICE officials taking part in the recent raid at Agriprocessors in Postville were quick to release dozens of detainees who had children to look after. They were released on the condition they appear before an administrative judge at a later date.

"ICE is committed to enforcing the nation's immigration laws in the workplace to maintain the integrity of the immigration system," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigation in Bloomington, Minn. "We carry out that obligation in a fair and responsible manner, ensuring humanitarian needs are taken into consideration."

The agency also was quick in allowing the media to check out the temporary processing center at the National Cattle Congress grounds.

"Our priority is to ensure the safety and security of everyone involved," ICE spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said the day of the raid.

She added that everyone's rights were being protected.

"We do have medical centers … shower facilities, recreational facilities, three meals a day, snacks," she said.

About 75 percent of detainees captured in the raid at Agriprocessors are Guatemalan and ICE officials invited Gustavo Lopez, a consul general from the Guatemalan consulate in Chicago to tour NCC. His only remark resembling a complaint was about the name of the grounds.

"The name 'National Cattle Congress' sounds very dramatic," he said. "But we were satisfied by the conditions of the facility. They know we are watching."

Lopez spoke with detainees and said he found no evidence of human or civil rights violations.

He verified detainees had access to legal representation, as well as showers, bathrooms, phones and clothing.
"We ate the same food as the detainees," he said.

These types of raids are controversial enough without complaints of mistreatment and dehumanizing conditions. ICE officials did well to learn from the possible public relations mistakes from 2006 and quickly address those concerns in this area.

Respect, even in the face of arrests and detention, is expected.