

Ronald Reagan said, "A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation."

But immigration policy is not just enforced at the U.S. border. With millions of illegal aliens already in the country, every community in every state is vulnerable to the problems caused by illegal immigration.

Illegal traffic over the U.S.-Mexico border includes drugs, counterfeit goods, weapons and people. The problems of illegal immigration that are not stopped at the border become the problem of communities of all sizes, all over the nation.

In Southern Missouri, we have experienced several incidents of lost job opportunities and a strain on local resources caused by illegal workers. As we learned in those cases, the assistance of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency is hundreds of miles away. Sometimes, they just tell the local authorities to let the illegal workers go.

Methamphetamine trafficking, in particular, has a strong relationship with illegal immigration. The meth manufactured in Mexico makes its way to Missouri, smuggled over the border and hidden in vehicles.

These are local problems in addition to being federal problems.

There is a better way to manage the federal and local resources which are responsible for enforcing the laws of our land.

Under the 287(g) program, federal authorities could train local law enforcement – officers, sheriffs, and Highway Patrol – to help enforce federal immigration law. Clearly, these officials could be in more places than the limited number of federal agents, who are mostly needed at the border.

But under the Obama Administration, this program has been used less and less. A thousand officers were trained in the first seven years of the program, resulting in over 120,000 identifications of illegal immigrants. Since 2009, only two agencies have signed up for the 287(g) program, however, and many will drop out over the next few years.

Why the change? Two reasons: first, the Obama Administration started to require local law enforcement to pursue all criminal charges before beginning any removal or deportation process and, second, the Administration limited immigration checks to suspected illegal immigrants who were arrested for major offenses. The first change laid additional costs at the feet of local authorities, and the second change drastically reduced the circumstances under which illegal immigrants could be identified.

If deportation is going to be the result of the apprehension of an illegal immigrant, and it should, then let's skip directly to that part of the process.

Men and women who come to America in violation of our laws and then commit further crimes should be dealt with efficiently by our system of criminal justice, but I'm afraid this is not what the Obama Administration wants. It is a shame, because local law enforcement officials will be forced to contend with lawbreaking illegal immigrants no matter what our laws say, the question remains, why won't this Administration allow them to do anything about it?