

## Union: Civil rights violations occurred with Swift raid

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A Grand Island single father dropped his baby off at the sitter's last Tuesday morning.

The baby is still there. The immigrant father hasn't returned.

Another Grand Island couple, here legally from Mexico, decided Grand Island is too dangerous a place for their young children. Even though the father is an American citizen and the mother is a legal resident, they believe the chance for separation is too great following last week's immigration raid at Swift & Co. They moved back to Mexico.

"It's my opinion, and the opinion of the international union, if there's criminal action, we don't condone criminals or any kind of illegal activity," said Dan Hoppes, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 22.

"But, by the same token, they could have come into these plants with warrants and arrested these people who are in violation without completely disrupting the whole community and the Hispanic population and whoever may be an immigrant."

Hoppes said his point is made by the numbers involved with the raid.

There are 13,000 Swift workers nationwide, and about 1,300 were detained in the Dec. 12 raid at six Swift plants, including the one in Grand Island.

For the 1,300 detained, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials had just 170 warrants for identity theft -- the professed reason for the raid, Hoppes said.

Hoppes said that, while "no rough treatment" of Swift workers occurred in Grand Island during the raid, he believes ICE officials violated civil rights by detaining legal residents. The union is studying the issue for a possible lawsuit.

He also believes the government's lack of providing family members information about the whereabouts and contact information for detainees is blatantly wrong.

Union and religious leaders have been attempting to find out the whereabouts of the single father. ICE has refused to release information because those representatives "aren't family," Hoppes said.

"People are scared," he said.

The raid has pointed out numerous things, Hoppes said.

There's a strong need for immigration reform, which must begin with strengthening the border. Hoppes said political leaders created the current immigration issue in the 1980s when there was a shortage of working-class laborers in the United States. They opened the borders and just looked the other way, he said.

Immigrants must be prepared by carrying documents to prove legal residency. They should also have at least two contacts of someone who could pick their children up at school or preschool.

The union is working to become more knowledgeable in immigration laws. It's already helping legal workers with expired work permits to update those documents. It continues to work to obtain information on raid detainees and make contact with attorneys for detainees with immigration court dates.

"But if they're illegal, there's not a lot we can do," Hoppes said.

The Grand Island community and churches have been the best responders to the situation, Hoppes said.

"Grand Island is a great community. There's a lot of great people here," he said.

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