

Opinion

Ice agents may or may not be a problem

By EMILY BURTON SHERMAN

While Western Kentucky has many problems, ICE is not one of them, yet. Or maybe it is. Who knows?

Getting to the bottom of an alleged ICE raid that sparked widespread rumors in Muhlenberg County last week was difficult to investigate as information regarding anyone caught up in the operation was more obscured than is readily available for those white defendants arrested for much worse.

This lack of transparency, fearmongering and the growing strangle hold on due process by a federal agency does little to keep any of us safer. It takes little more effort than a Google search to see the immigrants being scooped up by unidentified masked agents, like a seven year-old student recently arrested in New York, are not the dangerous criminals the White House would have us believe. Instead, such raids only serve to divide us further, at our own peril.

We cannot hope to be a safe, prosperous community if there is a void of distrust and secrecy between our police force and our citizens. Yet this divide is exactly what ICE agents create each time unmarked government vehicles appear in our neighborhoods.

Much of what was eventually uncovered about the rumored local ICE raid cannot be reported as it puts those parties involved at risk. Those with the most to gain by speaking out against masked ICE officers terrorizing our immigrant neighbors cannot do so publicly for fear of deportation. Those citizens with knowledge of the local incident in which one person was reportedly taken into ICE custody are rightfully fearful to speak to anyone should it cause harm to the detainee or further imperil the immigrant community.

At the Hopkins County Jail, which recently be-



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came an ICE detention facility, the names, ages and faces of those being held by ICE are listed publicly.

However, while viewers are privy to the why, when and how of local adult arrests - such as someone’s criminal charges, the arresting officer’s name, a case number and a court date - those same fields are empty for the dozens of Hispanic detainees there listed only as “Inmate Class: ICE”.

Under their mug shots, no criminal charges are posted. The race of most ICE detainees is listed as “UNKNOWN” despite all evidence to the contrary. Their ages are listed but their arrest date, arresting officer, case number and next court date are all blank. Everyone associated with ICE arrests seems to have been protected by obscurity except the immigrants themselves.

It’s almost as if ICE agents are trying to hide their actions in order to disappear our neighbors, employees and fellow faithful without the public being able to serve as citizen watchdogs. This is blatantly against not only the Constitution but the very fabric of our democracy.

Despite the Founding Fathers’ clear stance on due process, despite all established precedent in the courts, despite the very rationale behind our Revolutionary War, unconvicted immigrant detainees are being held in custody on American soil in obscurity and denied due process because they lack the proper paperwork.

Given migrants’ robust economic contributions to our country’s bottom line - billions of dollars annually - the question remains why the president would rather keep them undocumented and in expensive private detention centers than create an easy immigration registration platform that benefits us all.

Undocumented migrants do not live in an economic void in their communities. The Kentucky Center for Economic Policy estimated that migrant workers and business owners contribute \$14 billion of economic output in our commonwealth. These same business owners stand to lose their livelihoods when an entire swath of a community’s workforce is afraid to show up to their jobs

following the mere mention of ICE in their area.

You cannot claim to be a small business advocate yet strip those same companies of a crucial part of their workforce while ignoring migrants’ vast economic contributions.

Furthermore, the American Immigration Council notes that undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$233 million in taxes in Kentucky. Yet they cannot, and do not, draw Social Security or Medicare. Such immigrants are akin to the state winning the lottery each month without purchasing a ticket or paying taxes on the winnings.

One would think a commonwealth that fell \$250 million short of the expected sales tax revenue last fiscal year would be more interested in protecting those workers who both live in and spend their income in its communities.

Even as federal inmates in local jails, undocumented immigrants still find a way to contribute to our community’s fiscal wellbeing. As reported by the Lexington Herald-Leader last month, “The federal government can pay as much as \$73 a day per inmate, nearly twice what the Kentucky Department of Corrections pays county jails to house state inmates, which is roughly \$35 a day, according to federal and state data.”

When local Hispanic children are too afraid to attend their own soccer games due to fears of ICE raids, we have utterly failed as a small town reputed to care for our neighbors and fellow human beings.

When able-bodied workers who directly contribute millions to Kentucky’s economy are instead driven into hiding by federal agents over a misdemeanor paperwork infraction, then it is no longer an immigration issue. It is racially motivated scapegoating that will kill our commonwealth’s economic growth while abusing due process and sowing the bitter fruits of fear.

And frankly, here in Kentucky, aren’t we better neighbors than that?

Emily Sherman is a columnist and educator who resides in Muhlenberg County with her family of miscreants, saints and the odd stray cat.

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In Kentucky, we’ve spent years growing talent — only to have Washington slam the door

By NICHOLAS D. HARTLEP
Kentucky Lantern

While the nation was distracted by headlines about celebrity trials and summer storms, a seismic shift occurred in American education policy: The U.S. Department of Education was effectively gutted by President Donald Trump’s so-called One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Billed as a move to return power to the states, this legislation dismantles the infrastructure of federal student aid, guts Pell Grants, halts income-driven repayment programs and eliminates Public Service Loan Forgiveness. The Pell Grants program is a lifeline for low-income students that covers up to roughly \$7,400 annually, but still leaves significant unmet need.

The implications of these changes are catastrophic — and not just for students. This law represents a total abandonment of education as a public good, and the consequences will be felt in every community, including right here in Kentucky, where the median household income is just \$58,000 and more than 40% of college students depend on federal aid.

As someone who has spent years researching and writing about student loan debt, I know how fragile our current system already is: Tuition costs continue to outpace inflation, repayment programs are cumbersome and inconsistent, and federal aid has never kept pace with the true cost of attending college. But the new law doesn’t fix what’s broken — it breaks what was barely holding together, by closing pathways to professional advancement for future lawyers, teachers, doctors and scientists.

Ending income-based repayment and Public Service Loan Forgiveness means new doctors — who typically start their careers with six-figure debt — will be forced into unaffordable standard repayment schedules. Without the safety net of income-based repayment or the promise of forgiveness after serving high-need communities, many will abandon medical training altogether or avoid practicing in rural and underserved areas where salaries are lower.

These changes come as the U.S. faces a looming doctor shortage, especially in rural areas like Kentucky. But this law makes it harder than ever to grow our health care workforce.

The blow is even worse for aspiring doctors of color. In 2023, only 5.7% of active physicians in the U.S. were Black, despite Black Americans making up over 13% of the population. Latino, Indigenous and low-income communities are similarly underrepresented. How do we close health disparities if we close the door on the very students who would serve these communities?

This issue is personal for me, not just as a scholar of education and student debt, but as a father. My daughter recently graduated from Frederick

Douglass High School in Lexington, where she completed the biomedical sciences magnet program, part of the nationally renowned Project Lead the Way curriculum. She is now headed to Amherst College to study pre-med, with dreams of becoming a physician.

Her journey exemplifies what’s possible when a school district invests in excellence. Under the leadership of Superintendent Demetrus Liggins — who was just named Kentucky Superintendent of the Year — Fayette County Public Schools are preparing students to lead, innovate and serve.

How can a district so effectively prepare its students for college, only to have college become unreachable or unsupportive due to federal abandonment? This is the contradiction that cuts to the heart of America’s education crisis: We spend years cultivating brilliance in our youth — only to shrivel the pipeline at the very moment it matters most.

Yet Kentucky’s elected leaders have largely abandoned the state. U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, who once championed Pell Grants, has quietly voted in favor of the act. U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, who represents Lexington and many of our college towns, not only voted in favor of the act, he championed it. And U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie was so committed to gutting the federal Department of Education that he reintroduced the bill to abolish it.

These voting patterns aren’t surprising. The National Education Association legislative report gave all of Kentucky’s Republican congresspeople and senators a grade of F. Only a few officials, like U.S. Rep. Morgan McGarvey, have spoken out against these cuts. McGarvey shows how we Kentuckians can build a new coalition for higher education — one that is bipartisan and unapologetically pro-learning.

We must pressure our elected officials in Kentucky to restore federal student aid, reinvest in Pell, and protect public institutions by ensuring they have stable federal funding, guardrails against state disinvestment and the capacity to serve all qualified students regardless of family income.

Higher education should not be rationed to the wealthy. It must remain a public commitment — a bridge to careers, to service, to self-determination. Without it, we abandon not only students, but the very idea of a society in which talent — not zip code or family circumstance — shapes one’s future.

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