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Rush to Hire ICE Agents Spurs \$50,000 Bonuses, No Age Caps

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Uncle Sam. Miami Vice. When it comes to recruiting new Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, the Trump administration is getting creative.

A social-media campaign launched late last month touted immigration enforcement as an opportunity for father-son bonding and to “deport illegals with your absolute boys,” a slang term for close friends. The Department of Homeland Security has invoked world-war-era imagery and touted 1990s Superman actor Dean Cain in an all out blitz to persuade Americans they should join ICE’s ranks.

The federal government also offered hefty incentives: up to \$50,000 in signing bonuses and up to \$60,000 in student-loan forgiveness. No undergraduate degree is required. DHS also lifted the age cap for law-enforcement roles, opening a deportation officer position specifically for people over 40, and tried to woo back retired law-enforcement officials with a “return to mission” campaign.

“America has been invaded by criminals and predators,” the agency says on its recruiting website. “We need YOU to get them out.”

President Trump’s massive tax and spending bill allocated more than \$150 billion for immigration enforcement, kicking off a rapid effort to scale operations and fulfill his goal of carrying out the largest deportation effort in U.S. history.

ICE deported 144,000 people through the end of June, according to a Wall Street Journal analysis of government data released by the Deportation Data Project. That is slightly more than the 136,854 people deported during the same time last year under the Biden administration, ICE data showed.

A major part of Trump’s effort is hiring more people to arrest, investigate and prose-

cute migrants. To do so, the administration must convince thousands of qualified candidates to take on a role that has become deeply divisive in recent months.

On social media and in online forums, people impressed with the recruitment drive said they were excited to apply because they believed in the mission. One applicant, who

currently works at Lowe's, the big-box hardware store, said the financial perks were hard to ignore.

"It's hard to pay those student loans off," the applicant said, citing monetary incentives including wiping out his college debt. "I can live with less stress, even in a job that guarantees some level of violence."

'A huge step'

Working with ICE sounded more exciting, upwardly mobile and better-paying than his current job, which he described as moving mulch bags and pavers.

"To go from Customer Support Associate to DHS ICE Deportation Officer feels like a huge step and I am ready to answer the calling," he said.

DHS says the campaign is yielding early results. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said that more than 110,000 people have applied. It isn't clear how many of those applicants would be viable candidates for the job.

The social-media posts have sparked mixed reactions. Some online commenters were enthusiastic about the effort, expressing their desire to serve the country. Others took offense at the overall tone, especially the myriad posts featuring the classic American symbol of Uncle Sam.

Back when Uncle Sam was ubiquitous in World War I, the draft made recruiting problems far easier to solve, said David Kennedy, a history professor at Stanford University. But he said the federal government nevertheless relied heavily on the symbol to help tip public opinion in favor of American involvement.

It is possible, he said, that DHS was doing the same.

"That image is put to a lot of work in the World War I era," Kennedy said. "And I can't help but think that there's something analogous going on today."

ICE highlights three potential career paths on its recruitment website: deportation officer ("the enforcers"), criminal investigator ("the protectors") and general attorney ("the closers"). Deportation officers can expect to make between \$49,739 to \$101,860 a year. The range for criminal investigators runs between \$63,148 and \$144,031.

For aspiring law-enforcement officials, the pay is competitive. A starting officer in the New York City Police Department makes roughly \$61,000 and new recruits in the Chicago Police Department make roughly \$62,000, according to department websites— though salaries at both departments rise rapidly in the first several years of service.

The bonus ICE is offering new recruits is the major differentiator, said University of New Haven criminal justice professor John DeCarlo. De-Carlo, who spent more than three decades with the Branford Police Department in Connecticut, said the \$50,000 bonus and \$60,000 studentloan forgiveness vastly outpace what's being offered by local police departments around the U.S.

Six-figure package

“State and local agencies can’t possibly compete with a six-figure federal incentive package,” he said.

Of particular issue, according to Polk County, Fla., Sheriff Grady Judd, was a recruiting email sent directly to local law-enforcement officers who had already received some training with ICE.

“To use government emails to talk directly to the deputies... that is not right, it’s not professional,” Judd said about DHS’s recruitment efforts.

DHS on Friday said its supercharged effort to bulk up ICE will include “partners who have already been trained and have valuable law enforcement experience.”

ICE jobs and roles with local police have many similarities. Deportation officers and criminal investigators are required to carry a firearm and must pass a physical-fitness test and medical examination. Some postings warn that the new hires may be required to work in dangerous and stressful situations.

Open positions

Positions are open across the country, with vacancies listed from Harlingen, Texas, near the U.S.-Mexico border, to cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago.

One taker? Cain, the Superman actor, who promoted the ICE jobs in a post on Instagram and later said on Fox News that he would be sworn in as an ICE agent “ASAP.”

Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin previously said Cain would become an honorary ICE officer in the coming month.

When asked if he planned to do real field work, including jumping out of vans and arresting immigrants, Cain said he would do whatever was asked of him by acting ICE Director Todd Lyons. He acknowledged, however, that it is unlikely he’d be on the front lines of enforcement.

“I somehow doubt I’ll be in that position,” Cain said. “But I would be there in a heartbeat.”