

Christie: Track Immigrants Like FedEx Tracks Packages

Republican presidential candidate Chris Christie pushed back on Sunday against “ridiculous” criticism of his proposal to track foreign visitors the way FedEx Corp tracks packages, saying government needs private-sector expertise to tackle illegal immigration.

“I don’t mean people are packages, so let’s not be ridiculous,” the New Jersey governor told an interviewer on Fox News Sunday who pointed out that foreigners do not have labels on their wrists.

“This is once again a situation where the private sector laps us in the government with the use of technology,” Christie said. “We should bring in the folks from FedEx to use the technology to be able to do it. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Christie said on Saturday that if he wins the November 2016 presidential election, he would use a FedEx-like system to make sure visitors who enter the United States legally on visas depart the country when their time is up. He said that 40 percent of illegal immigrants with visas overstay their visits.

Package delivery companies like FedEx and United Parcel Service Inc use bar-coded labels to record the movements of parcels through sorting facilities to delivery. Christie did not explain how his approach would work, but said he wants visa holders to be tracked from the moment they enter the United States and then notified when it is time for them to leave. Experts say visa overstays pose a growing problem, with some research showing that over half of recent illegal immigrants entered the United States legally.

But the solution could be more a question of political priorities than new technology systems. Some say the federal government could address the problem by sending visa holders text messages when their stay is ending and by recording their departures from all ports and border crossings.

“There’ve been very spotty, half-hearted efforts at doing exit tracking,” said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a nonpartisan group that favors a tighter policy.

Christie, who is running well behind among the 17 contenders in the Republican White House race, sought to draw a distinction between his proposal and what he called Republican front-runner Donald Trump’s “simplistic” idea on how to deal with an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

Trump, who has a 21-point lead over his closest Republican rival, Mike Huckabee, according to a Reuters/Ipsos survey, has said he would deport undocumented immigrants and build a wall between the United States and Mexico.

“I’ve put forward a much more detailed proposal than that,” said Christie, adding that the presidential race was “not only about personality. It’s also about ideas. And it’s about who can get it done.”

Christie has said he would ask FedEx Chief Executive Officer Fred Smith to devise the tracking system. A FedEx spokeswoman on Sunday declined to comment on his remarks.

But immigrant advocates say the New Jersey governor said little to separate himself from Trump.

“Basically, he put a stamp on everyone’s wrist without providing a solution for the people who are here,” said Dawn Le, spokeswoman for the Alliance for Citizenship, a nonprofit group that wants a pathway to citizenship for illegal

immigrants.

“How is his proposal any different than Donald Trump’s? Would he deport all 11 million people? He didn’t say.”

Trump’s railing about illegal immigrants has prompted other Republicans to talk tougher on immigration but has also rattled Republican Party leaders who are desperate to attract support from Latino voters who have Democrat Hillary Clinton’s pledge to seek citizenship for illegal immigrants if elected in 2016.

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