

Last week, I introduced legislation that will enable the Social Security Administration to share information with the Department of Homeland Security to help prevent identity theft and for detecting the fraudulent use of Social Security numbers. Millions of Americans are hurt by identity theft every year. Clearly, our system is broken.

My legislation would enable the Social Security Administration to perform, at the request of the Department of Homeland Security, a search for records that will identify individuals and employers who are using false names, false social security numbers, the same social security number used by multiple individuals, the illegal use of social security numbers from deceased individuals, and by individuals who had applied and received a social security number but who are not legally entitled to work due to their immigration status.

Unfortunately, current law precludes the Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security from working together by comparing their data bases to help identify fraud.

These bureaucratic loopholes continue to obstruct agency cooperation when dealing with identity theft and those who fraudulently use Social Security Numbers to steal from Americans.

This legislation will authorize the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies to work together to combat the persistent threat of identity theft.

In 2008, local authorities in Greeley showed how serious the problem is in Colorado when they uncovered 1,338 possible cases of identity theft by illegal immigrants after seizing records from a Greeley-based tax preparer. Using fraudulent social security numbers, more than \$2.6 million in tax payments were obtained from the IRS over a two year period.

Many of the tax refunds were actually transfer payments paid for by U.S. taxpayers as part of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program. The EITC is a refundable federal income tax credit for low to moderate income earning working individuals and families.

Congress originally approved the tax credit legislation in 1975 in part to offset the burden of social security taxes and to provide an incentive to work.

When the EITC exceed the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit.

The American Civil Liberties Union has sued to block the evidence claiming the search of the tax preparer's office was illegally conducted. The local prosecutor, Ken Buck, is appealing the judge's ruling.

According to the most recent numbers by the Federal Trade Commission, 8.3 million adults in the United States were victims of identity theft in 2005. In that same year, 1.8 million adults in the U.S. reported their personal information fraudulently used by someone else.

This legislation will end a bureaucratic loophole that has kept federal agencies from cooperating in the fight against identity theft. According to Attorney General John Suthers, identity theft is one of the more pernicious crimes plaguing Colorado and any effort is welcomed that will help law enforcement rein in the illegal use of the identities of Coloradans.

Suthers has publicly stated that this legislation, if passed, would give our leaders one more tool to bring to bear in the fight against identity theft.

As printed in the Greenwood Villager; May 29, 2009