

Largest US immigration raids in a decade lead to 680 arrests

By **ROGELIO SOLIS**
and **JEFF AMY**
Associated Press

MORTON, Miss. — U.S. immigration officials raided numerous Mississippi food processing plants Wednesday, arresting 680 mostly Latino workers in what marked the largest workplace sting in at least a decade.

The raids, planned months ago, happened just hours before President Donald Trump was scheduled to visit El Paso, Texas, the majority-Latino city where a man linked to an online screed about a “Hispanic invasion” was charged in a shooting that left 22 people dead in the border city.

Workers filled three buses — two for men and one for women — at a Koch Foods Inc. plant in tiny Morton, 40 miles east of Jackson. They were taken to a military hangar to be processed for immigration violations. About 70 family, friends and residents waved goodbye and shouted, “Let them go! Let them go!” Later, two more buses arrived.

A tearful 13-year-old boy whose parents are from Guatemala waved goodbye to his mother, a Koch worker, as he stood beside his father. Some employees tried to flee on foot but were captured in the parking lot.

Workers who were confirmed to have legal status were allowed to leave the plant after having their trunks searched.

“It was a sad situation inside,” said Domingo Candelaria, a legal resident and Koch worker who said authorities checked employees’ identification documents.

The company did not immediately respond to an emailed request for



Two people are taken into custody at a Koch Foods Inc. plant in Morton, Miss.

AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

comment.

About 600 agents fanned out across the plants involving several companies, surrounding the perimeters to prevent workers from fleeing. They occurred in small towns near Jackson with a workforce made up largely of Latino immigrants, including Bay Springs, Carthage, Canton, Morton, Pelahatchie and Sebastopol.

Matthew Albence, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s acting director, said the raids could be the largest such operation thus far in any single state.

Asked to comment on the fact that the raid was happening on the same day as Trump’s El Paso visit, Albence responded, “This is a long-term operation that’s been going on. Our enforcement operations are being done on a racially neutral basis. Investigations are based on evidence.”

Such large shows of force were common under Presi-

dent George W. Bush, most notably at a kosher meat-packing plant in tiny Postville, Iowa, in 2008. President Barack Obama avoided them, limiting his workplace immigration efforts to low-profile audits that were done outside of public view.

Trump resumed workplace raids, but the months of preparation and hefty resources they require make them rare. Last year, the administration hit a landscaping company near Toledo, Ohio, and a meat-packing plant in eastern Tennessee. The former owner of the Tennessee plant was sentenced to 18 months in prison last month.

A hangar at the Mississippi National Guard in Flowood, near Jackson, was set up with 2,000 meals to process employees for immigration violations on Wednesday. There were seven lines, one for each location that was hit. Buses had been lined up

since early in the day to be dispatched to the plants.

“I’ve never done anything like this,” said Chris Heck, resident agent in charge of ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations unit in Jackson. “This is a very large worksite operation.”

Koch Foods, based in Park Ridge, Illinois, is one of the largest poultry producers in the U.S. and employs about 13,000 people, with operations in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio and Tennessee.

Forbes ranks it as the 135th-largest privately held company in the U.S., with an estimated \$3.2 billion in annual revenue. The Morton plant produces more than 700,000 tons of poultry feed a year, company officials said in February. The company has no relation to prominent conservative political donors and activists Charles and David Koch.

Protests dog Trump’s visits to Dayton, El Paso

By **ZEKE MILLER**
and **JILL COLVIN**
Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — Aiming to play the traditional role of healer during national tragedy, President Donald Trump paid visits Wednesday to two cities reeling from mass shootings that left 31 dead and dozens more wounded.

But his divisive words preceded him, large protests greeted him and biting political attacks soon followed.

The president and first lady Melania Trump flew to El Paso late in the day after visiting the Dayton hospital, where many of the victims of Sunday’s attack in that city were treated. The president was kept out of view of the reporters traveling with him, but White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham said the couple met with hospital staff and first responders and spent time with wounded survivors and their families.

Trump told them he was “with them,” she said. “Everybody received him very warmly. Everybody was very, very excited to see him.”

But outside Miami Valley Hospital, at least 200 protesters gathered, blaming Trump’s incendiary rhetoric for inflaming political and racial tensions in the country and demanding action on gun control. Some said Trump was not welcome in their city. There were Trump supporters, as well.

Emotions are still raw in the aftermath of the early Sunday morning shooting rampage that left 10 dead,

including the gunman, in the city’s popular Oregon entertainment district. Critics contend Trump’s own words have contributed to a combustible climate that has spawned violence in cities including El Paso, where another shooter killed 22 people over the weekend.

And the vitriol continued Wednesday. Trump spent part of his flight between Ohio and Texas airing his grievances on Twitter, berating Democratic lawmakers, a potential 2020 rival and the press. It was a remarkable split-screen appearance for TV viewers, with White House images of handshakes and selfies juxtaposed with angry tweets.

Trump and the White House have forcefully disputed the idea that he bears some responsibility for the nation’s divisions. And Trump continued to do so as he left for the trip on Wednesday.

“My critics are political people,” Trump said, noting the apparent political leanings of the shooter in the Dayton killings. He also defended his rhetoric on issues including immigration, claiming instead that he “brings people together.”

Some 85% of U.S. adults believe the tone and nature of political debate has become more negative, with a majority saying Trump has changed things for the worse, according to recent Pew Research Center polling. And more than three quarters, 78%, say that elected officials who use heated or aggressive language to talk about certain people or groups make violence against those people more likely.

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