

*Winter*



*City News*

*From Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz*

## **Audit eagles could ensure city contractors employ only legal**

When the economic downturn forced the city to cut services, impose layoffs, mandate unpaid furlough days, and delay raises, loyal workers sacrificed. That was painful enough. Citizens and city employees shouldn't have to watch undocumented workers get paid to perform city contracts, too!

This problem came to light recently when a constituent asked me about a road crew that was repairing curbs and gutters for the Public Works Department. An audit showed that 12 of the 25 Social Security numbers supplied by the contractor, Noraa Concrete, didn't match the names. One or two could be a clerical error, but nearly half the workforce?

The auditor held up payments and notified the contractor. Noraa said it had complied with immigration law. But clearly the city shouldn't have to rely on random inquiries by constituents to make sure contractors don't use undocumented workers on city projects. And the city should have clearer guidelines as to when a contract should be canceled.

I'm advised that relying solely on individual complaints could raise federal legal questions of discrimination on the basis of language or ethnicity. But neither can the city sit by while abuses occur. What Denver needs is a reliable, neutral mechanism for investigating complaints or performing audits of its contractors.

Other steps could include adopting the E-Verify system that the federal government uses to make sure employees are legal, sanctioning the licenses of contractors that don't comply with city status rules, and adopting the state's system for investigating complaints.

I have been researching city ordinances and state and federal laws to look for the best approach to beefing up our laws, and I hope to pursue legislation this year. A solution can't come too soon. Paying undocumented workers top dollar - based on rules that require "prevailing wages" for contract work - while citizens receive fewer services and city workers sacrifice is intolerable. This contractor/worker dilemma needs to be fixed fast.

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