

Tell Congress to Fix Guest Worker Shortages, Grow American Business!

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to pass important legislation that will provide relief for chronic labor shortages, especially in the agricultural sector. To bridge the gap between labor needs, and worker supply, the horse industry relies on two major guest worker programs managed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically the H-2A and H-2B programs. Unfortunately piles of red tape and ambiguous work requirements delay the issuance of timely visas and prevent the horse industry and other sectors from hiring the workers they need.

There are two vehicles moving through Congress that can fix the shortage. The AG and Legal Workforce Act of 2018 (H.R. 6417), introduced in late June, clearly states that **personnel involved in the “management and training of equines” will qualify to participate in a newly-created H-2C visa program for farm workers.** Furthermore, the bill reduces financial and paperwork mandates, and establishes a baseline of up to 450,000 visas. The second vehicle, the House FY2019 DHS (H.R. 6776) appropriation, addresses the stringent 66,000 cap imposed on the issuance of H-2B visas by providing an exemption for returning workers. This “returning worker” exemption not only provides much needed cap relief, but will reduce red tape for seasonal employers.

Status:

Since House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) introduced the AG and Legal Workforce Act in late June, the bill has garnered more than 110 co-sponsors, underscoring support to reform the broken H-2A visa program. With respect to the H-2B visa program, the House version of the FY2019 DHS appropriation (H.R. 6776) includes the industry-preferred “returning worker exemption.” Congress will not take up the FY2019 DHS funding bill until after the November election.

Action:

House Message: Sign up as a co-sponsor of the AG and Legal Workforce Act (H.R. 6417). The legislation not only reforms the agriculture visa program, but it identifies the horse industry as a program beneficiary, creating certainty for the equine sector. On the H-2B visa front, tell your lawmaker to preserve the “returning worker exemption” included in the House version of the FY2019 DHS funding bill, as the legislation moves forward.

Senate Message: Tell your senators that House colleagues are moving legislation that identifies the horse industry as an eligible sector to participate in a reformed H-2A visa program and to support any similar measure in the Senate, moving forward. With respect to H-2B visas, tell your senators that the House version of the FY2019 DHS appropriations bill includes important H-2B visa “cap relief” that the senate should support as the bill moves forward.