

NOVEMBER, 2007



H2AUSA.COM Newsletter

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We have specialized in migrant workers for over 20 years.
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FROM: THE H2AUSA FRONT DESK:

Farmers Together, Government Split on AgJOBS

Today, October 30, 2007, President Bush blasted Democrats in Congress for "not getting its work done," and instead wasting time on endless investigations of Republican efforts and trying to subvert the course of the Iraq war by attempting to pull the troops out.

He also criticized them for adding taxes into a number of bills, including this year's farm bill, among others. Democrats countered by saying they refuse to 'rubber-stamp' the President's agendas and that he is on the wrong track with a multitude of issues that they are determined to push.

And while the Dream Act has been shot down in flames for the fourth time in Congress by the same Senate that pushed for it earlier, the American peoples' faith in their legislative bodies to take action on important bills like AgJOBS has almost been extinguished. NumbersUSA.com reports:

"Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) announced last Friday that The Farm Bill Extension Act of 2007 (H.R. 2419) is likely to come up for debate on the Senate floor during the week of November 5. Recently, Leader Reid had promised to attempt to attach the AgJOBS amnesty for illegal farmworkers to the farm bill during floor consideration. Despite the pleas of some open

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borders senators to forgo debate of additional amnesties this year, it appears another major Senate battle may be in the works next week. *CongressDaily* reported this morning that although Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) supports "resolving immigration problems," he will "resist" efforts to add AgJOBS to the farm bill."¹

"Pro-amnesty advocacy groups are telling their members that Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) have promised them that AgJOBS will be attached to the farm bill this fall and be signed into law,"² Numbers.USA.com also reports.

And while the H-2A program is in need of reform, the migrant group lobbyists are putting all their efforts into an amnesty for the illegal workers their clients already are hiring. The labor unions and activists rights groups with their lawyers are pursuing the same tack as well, threatening and starting legal actions.

Groups such as the National Farm Worker Ministry, supports complete amnesty, as stated in a letter dated June 28, 2007 on its homepage: Quote: "National Farm Worker Ministry has been working with farm worker groups nationwide for passage of the comprehensive immigration bill which included AgJOBS."³

And that has been the sticking point in getting a good bill for agriculture passed—the tying

together of AgJOBS with other agenda-driven measures submitted by special interest groups. Caught in the middle are the farms and agricultural concerns, who are neither for unconditional amnesty for untold millions, nor for the present restrictive programs of the government for legal seasonal workers. They want reform that will give greater access to legal laborers with the skills necessary to produce results for their ventures.

As Bob Stallman, American Farm Bureau Federation President says:

"Sustaining our current level of productivity is contingent on a stable, reliable and legal workforce. Nowhere is the problem more acute than in agriculture," AFBF President Bob Stallman testified at a House Agriculture Committee hearing on the labor needs of American agriculture. "The labor situation on America's farms and ranches is closely linked with the issue of immigration reform."⁴

Stallman cited statistics indicating that 53 percent of the labor force on farms was illegal.

"Without a stable, legal supply of labor to replace currently unauthorized workers, the fresh fruit and vegetable sector could see U.S. production decline by up to \$9 billion a year," Stallman said. "Similarly, an abrupt loss of our labor supply could cause net farm income to drop by up to \$5 billion annually."⁵

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"Farmers Together" (continued)

In conclusion on the American Farm Bureau webpage, he reiterated what is on the heart of every farmer and agricultural interest that is looking for a true answer to our farm labor dilemma:

"AFBF continues to urge members of Congress to set aside their partisan and ideological differences and do what is right for agriculture, and the U.S. as a whole, by approving national immigration legislation reform legislation without delay."⁶

¹NumbersUSA.com, "*Senate AgJOBS Fight Expected on Farm Bill Next Week*," October 30, 2007, <http://www.numbersusa.com/hottopic/congress.html>. (accessed 10-30-2007)

²"*Senate AgJOBS Fight Expected on Farm Bill Next Week*."

³Virginia Nesmith, "*NFWM Response to Defeat of Comprehensive Immigration Reform*," June 28, 2007, National Farm Worker Ministry website at: <http://www.nfwm.org/index/index.shtml>. (accessed 10-30-2007)

⁴"*Legal, Stable Workforce Critical for Agriculture*," October 4, 2007, © 2007 American Farm Bureau Federation at American Farm Bureau.com, <http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=newsroom.newsfocus&year=2007&file=nr1004.html>. (accessed 10-30-2007)

⁵"*Legal, Stable Workforce Critical for Agriculture*."

⁶"*Legal, Stable Workforce Critical for Agriculture*."



Crisis of Conflict

A Series of Articles by:

Mike Nobles

President-www.H2AUSA.COM

Why H-2A?

Now, exactly *why* are H-2A agricultural workers needed? I hear that question a lot. Here's the short answer: Nearly a century ago, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, and 30 percent of the workforce was engaged in farming. Today, only 10 percent of Americans live in rural areas and fewer than 2 percent of Americans farm for a living today. That comes out to about 1.9 million heads of household that are farming. Compare that with the population of the U.S. prison system, which houses about 2 million. Yes, that's right—there are more people in jail today than head farm households!

Surprised?

Of course, some of that is due to the mechanization of the farms and improved techniques of cultivation, but the predominant reason that there are fewer farms and farmers is because we are taking in more and more agricultural products from overseas, due to devaluation of foreign currencies and

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“Why H-2A?” (continued)

competition with extremely low pay scales of the workforces of foreign nations. There is an international war going on, in fact; and it has been going on since World War II and its weapons are the free market system.

Because, roughly from that time until recently, our free trade with other countries has been working steadily against us, year after year, until at last, we are in the position of dependency. Our farms followed suit after the manufacturing sector, companies starting branches in Mexico or overseas and growing their produce or grain on foreign soil and exporting it back to America. Free trade caused an ever-deepening farm crisis as traditional U.S. markets here and abroad were captured by countries like Brazil and Argentina, whose lower labor costs have attracted Western capital. The scores of billions of dollars in subsidies taxpayers give farmers now is only a stopgap to keep them afloat financially—to make up for what the farmers are losing from globalization.

Only, the thing to remember here is that the Third World countries that are producing crops are not on the same playing field that we are in this country. With the North American Free

Trade Agreement or NAFTA, and the loss of some of our markets to Mexico, then the freeing up of the enormous labor pool of the Chinese (with an even cheaper source of workers) costs have thereby plummeted for our own agricultural products.

Americans have stopped thinking of putting American products first.

Can we recover? Yes, we can. But it will mean a change in plans. We no longer can depend on an infinite source of illegal labor from Mexico to support our agricultural base in America, paid for on the backs of the average taxpayer. No, what we need is a reliable and consistent source of workers who will labor for wages that are competitive with the international marketplace. After all, we have to compete on a *world* market now—not just a domestic one, as in days gone by.

And with the new electronic verification, the closing of our borders and the new impetus to find a reliable and stable workforce, H-2A or some variant of it will be a mainstay of the U.S. economy in the future.

