

to reality. Let's act boldly and fulfill our mandate. It's time to end this misguided occupation. It's time to bring our troops home.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CUELLAR). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HASTINGS of Washington addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

H-2B RETURNING WORKER PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of extending the H-2B returning worker program this year.

The H-2B visa program was created to provide access to nonimmigrant temporary workers for seasonal and peak load needs when no American workers can be found. Foreign workers offer small and seasonal businesses short-term help and return to their home country at the end of the season.

H-2B visas are capped at 66,000 visas per year. Even with 66,000 visas a year, it still does not meet the labor needs of seasonal businesses. To help fill these additional needs, Congress established the H-2B returning worker program in 2005. This program exempts returning workers who have received an H-2B visa in one of the three previous fiscal years from counting against the 66,000 cap. However, this program expired on September 30.

On September 27, 4 days before the season even started, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service had already received enough visa petitions to exceed the cap for H-2B visas for the first half of fiscal year 2008. The application process for the second half of fiscal year 2008 began on December 3, two days ago.

Without extending the returning worker program, it's expected that the visas will go quickly, leaving many businesses without the workers they need to fulfill their business needs. This demand highlights the immediate need for Congress to extend the H-2B returning worker program to help small and seasonal businesses fill their seasonal labor needs and keep full-time Americans and their businesses working.

These returning workers have provided relief to small businesses throughout the Nation, covering a

broad spectrum of industries like landscapers, tourism, seafood processors and carnivals.

At this time, I will enter into the RECORD a letter from the H-2B Workforce Coalition in support of extending the H-2B returning worker program.

WORKFORCE COALITION,
November 19, 2007.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: As representatives of tens of thousands of seasonal employers throughout the country, we urge you to support H.R. 1843, the "Save Our Small and Seasonal Business Act of 2007."

This bipartisan bill would simply renew the highly successful relief provision for the H-2B visa program that was initially approved by the Senate by 94-6 in 2005. This provision recognizes the reliability and trustworthiness of past participants in the H-2B program by exempting those temporary seasonal workers who have participated fiscal the H-2B visa program and have completely followed the law during the past three fiscal years from counting toward the statutory cap.

The congressionally mandated 66,000 annual cap on the number of workers allowed to participate in the program that was established in 1990 does not reflect current economic realities or meet the needs of businesses which are seasonal or have peak load needs that rely on these workers.

Before employers can hire temporary seasonal workers under the program, they must advertise their job openings, work with local unemployment offices to identify potential American workers and offer the positions to any qualified domestic applicants. The jobs these guest workers fill do not take jobs away from Americans. It is not until employers have carried out this time consuming and expensive due diligence in trying to hire American workers that they are allowed to petition the federal government for a labor certification and ultimately bring in temporary workers—their final option to run their seasonal businesses.

In fiscal year 2004, the statutory cap was reached on March 9—only six months into the fiscal year and before many summer employers had an opportunity to apply for seasonal workers. As a result, many of these businesses had to cancel events, operate at partial capacity, not open parts of their businesses, or have their full-time staff work overtime to the point of burnout.

Each subsequent year, the cap has been reached sooner as a result of the increased need for seasonal workers and an increasing labor shortage. The cap for the first half of fiscal year 2008 was reached on September 27—3 days before the fiscal year even began.

Without immediate action by Congress, widespread economic consequences will severely impact diverse economic sectors throughout the country including lodging, restaurants, landscaping, clubs, amusement parks, ski resorts, food processing, stone, travel and tourism, horse sports, construction, entertainment, hospitality, recreation and many other seasonal industries.

On behalf of thousands of small businesses and seasonal employers throughout the country, we urge you to support H.R. 1843 and secure its immediate passage.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:
American Forest & Paper Association
American Horse Council
American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Nursery and Landscape Association
American Rental Association
American Trucking Associations

Asian American Convenience Store Association

Asian American Hotel Owners Association
Associated Builders and Contractors
Associated General Contractors of America
Federation of Employers and Workers of America

International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions
Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute
International Franchise Association
National Club Association
National Federation of Independent Business

National Restaurant Association
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Ski Areas Association
National Thoroughbred Racing Association
Outdoor Amusement Business Association
Professional Landcare Network
Tree Care Industry Association
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

State and Regional Organizations:
Alabama Forestry Association
Alabama Hospitality Association
Alabama Restaurant Association
Alaska Hotel & Lodging Association
Alaska Restaurant & Beverage Association
Arizona Hotel & Lodging Association
Arizona Landscape Contractors Association

Arkansas Forestry Association
Arkansas Hospitality Association
Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado

Branson Lakes Area Lodging Association
California Hotel & Lodging Association
California Ski Industry Association
Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association

Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals

Colorado Hotel & Lodging Association
Colorado Restaurant Association
Commercial Flower Growers of Wisconsin
Delaware Restaurant Association
East Hampton Chamber of Commerce
Florida Forestry Association
Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association

Georgia Hotel & Lodging Association
Georgia Restaurant Association
Gulf Oyster Industry Council
Hawaii Hotel & Lodging Association
Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce

Hospitality Association of South Carolina
Hotel and Lodging Association of Greater Kansas City

Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association
Indiana Hotel & Lodging Association
Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association
Illinois Landscape Contractors Association
Iowa Lodging Association

Iowa Restaurant Association
Kentucky Hotel & Lodging Association
Kentucky Nursery & Landscape Association

Kentucky Restaurant Association
Kentucky Turfgrass Council
Landscape Contractors Association MD-DC-VA

Lawns of Wisconsin Network
Long Island Hotel and Lodging Association
Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau

Maine Campground Owners Association
Maine Innkeepers Association
Maine Merchants Association
Maine Restaurant Association
Maine Tourism Association
Maryland Hotel & Lodging Association
Massachusetts Lodging Association
Massachusetts Nursery & Landscape Association

Massachusetts Restaurant Association
Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association