

Immigration Reform On Right Path; Refinement Needed in Seasonal Guest Worker Component

Just one month ago, the Colorado Employers for Immigration Reform, a multi-industry business coalition formed to advocate a sensible, comprehensive solution to the immigration crisis in our country. Our group represents businesses employing more than 500,000 people and contributes \$26 billion to the state economy annually. Since our launch and to our relief, Congress has made remarkable progress toward fixing the broken immigration system that has plagued many of our state's businesses.

The bipartisan compromise agreement envisioned in the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 (S. 1348) announced last week addresses the four principle areas that Colorado Employers for Immigration Reform believes are crucial to effective reform: enhanced border security; a new employment verification system; provisions for future temporary, year round guest worker programs to fill jobs that U.S. workers are unable to fill; and, settling the legal status of the 12 million undocumented people already in the country.

As the bill is being debated over the next few weeks, many Colorado businesses will be eager to see provisions retained that allows us to continue a legal avenue for hiring a seasonal work force included in the bill, similar to the current H2-B visa program.

Several important industries to our state including hotels and lodging, landscape, nurseries and restaurants all depend on an ongoing seasonal workforce to fill jobs due to the state's low unemployment rate and the lack of interest they receive from Americans in seasonal work and the type of jobs to be filled.

While the Y2-B component of the new bill addresses seasonal guest workers, Colorado businesses need ongoing assurances that we can bring in a seasonal workforce every year during peak seasons. We need the ability to bring back the same workers annually to avoid unnecessary and expensive training and recruitment. We also need to make sure the number of seasonal workers is dictated by the market's need and not a set cap that may actually be lower than what we now have in place. Most importantly, we need to make sure we can continue to use a seasonal workforce until comprehensive reform takes effect and while border security issues are being resolved.

We recognize not everyone will agree with all provisions of the 326-page bill. However, Colorado Employers for Immigration Reform believes "perfect" should not be the enemy of the good. In the good faith spirit of the negotiations to date, we support the bill. We applaud the senators and representatives of the Administration that negotiated in good faith to find workable and fair solutions to the myriad of problems requiring attention in our failed immigration system.

Senator Ken Salazar deserves special thanks for the constructive role he has played in seeking solutions to comprehensive immigration reform. His leadership on the negotiation committee and willingness to represent diverse interests in Colorado is notable and appreciated. As we move forward, we encourage Colorado employers to communicate with our congressional leaders that immigration reform is needed and 2007 is the year to accomplish it.

Sincerely,

Mike Gilsdorf
President, Colorado Employers for Immigration Reform