

## **Rep. Billy Long (MO-7) Member's Day Testimony for the Record**

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Thursday, April 26, 2018

### **Opening**

Good afternoon Chairman Carter, Ranking Member \*Roybal-Allard and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for allowing me to come before you today to speak on the importance of the H-2B seasonal worker visa program.

Many of us in this room represent districts with various small and seasonal businesses that are struggling to find local workers to fill seasonal, temporary jobs. Many of these businesses depend on seasonal workers through the H-2B visa program. Relief for these seasonal businesses is urgently needed and cannot wait. I am here today to ask for your support to include key H-2B visa program provisions in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Fiscal Year 2019 proposal.

### **H-2B Visas**

The H-2B program is essential to employers who cannot find American workers to fill temporary jobs in seafood processing, horse training, hospitality and amusement parks, forestry, landscaping, circuses, carnivals, and many other seasonal industries. It is important to point out that these workers are not immigrants. They provide an opportunity for businesses to operate at a greater capacity, retain their full-time workers and contribute to their local economies. The H-2B program sustains American jobs. In fact, every H-2B visa issued supports 4.6 American jobs on average.

Unfortunately, the program's annual 66,000 visa cap (33,000 for each half of the fiscal year) is not adequate to meet the demands of a growing economy. In fact, the cap for the second half of the fiscal year 2018 was reached on February 27, 2018, leaving many seasonal employers excluded from the program with no access to legal seasonal laborers, leading to potential reductions in operating hours and closures. Without action, it is inevitable that the H-2B visa cap will be reached early on in the fiscal year 2019. An increase in the H-2B visa allotment from the existing 66,000 visas would certainly be a big step in the right direction. Often, the cap is reached literally within days of when work petition applications are accepted. The program has essentially become a lottery, as the demand for visas is far greater than what is issued.

### **Missouri and H-2B Visas**

I understand first-hand the importance of this program. Missouri's Seventh Congressional District, which I represent, is a tourism hotspot. I am proud to represent, such entertainment centers as Branson, MO., a small town of just over 11,000 taking in 8 ½ million visitors every year. The deficiency in finding available employees in Branson affects everything from hotels, to restaurants, to theme parks, to landscaping businesses – these are employers who have tried for years to fill the need for employees with locals and have been unable to do so. The H-2B program provides the Branson community and many other destination cities across the country the ability to find employees so they can provide their services to the public. These seasonal destinations are very much dependent upon such a program for the commerce in the area to effectively function. Simply put, there are just not enough able individuals available to fill the job openings.

### **Conclusion**

Again, I appreciate the Committee's continued willingness to listen to the views of Members like myself. I know the Appropriations Committee will face some tough decisions on priorities for fiscal year 2019. For this reason, I respectfully ask for your support to include key H-2B visa program provisions in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Fiscal Year 2019 proposal.