

## **H2B visa news most welcome Kratovil, Mikulski deserve credit for their hard work**

AUGUST 7, 2009

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Some welcome news flowed out of Washington on Thursday when the Department of Homeland Security announced the release of additional H2B visas for temporary workers.

These days, actions that may result in more foreign workers entering a community are met with local opposition. But by now, Shore residents should have a full understanding that the granting of such visas will provide immediate relief to many local crab-packing houses, which chronically face seasonal labor shortages. Just this summer, many packing houses that are indeed open are operating far below capacity. Putting workers in place to operate these houses can only benefit the local economy.

First District Congressman Frank Kratovil merits a good deal of the credit for winning the Department of Homeland Security's support for changing the visa policy. Federal immigration laws cap the H2B program at 66,000 visas per year; many crab packers have had their H2B applications denied as a result of the DHS formula for allocating visas under this cap. On Thursday, DHS said it agrees visas were under-allocated for fiscal year 2009 and an additional 25,000 visas will be granted.

Kratovil's efforts were spurred by local crab packers who have been yelling loud and long that they need the help. While honest work, the jobs in packing houses could hardly be called glamorous. Processing seafood is hard and sometimes tedious work. Finding employees is nearly impossible; increasing wages to make the jobs more desirable would raise seafood prices to levels consumers could quickly reject.

Sen. Barbara Mikulski, who has also been battling the visas issue for the past two years, deserves credit for refusing to give up. She called Thursday's news good "for Maryland's watermen, Maryland's crab industry and Maryland's economy."

The government's action on this should prove beneficial to a wide variety of economic entities. As Kratovil himself pointed out, the extra visas will not just help watermen and packing-house owners, but also truck drivers, restaurant owners, community bankers and "everyone else whose livelihood is impacted by the crabbing industry."

Foreign workers have supplemented the American labor force for many decades. There is no basis for believing there will be American citizens now applying for jobs that will not come close to supporting them or their families. Immigration reform is sorely needed, but there is no need to litter the path with businesses that failed because no temporary workers were available to meet their needs.