



Volunteers cleaning up Arlington while pushing for guest worker program extension

(National-NBC) July 24, 2006 - A few hundred immigrants and their bosses are in Washington this week to convince Congress to extend and expand America's guest worker program.

While in the Washington area, they're doing some volunteer work to help honor America's fallen war heroes.

The workers did liming, planting and mulching on the grounds. Maurice Dowell of Wildwood, Missouri looks at it as a chance to "give back something to my country."

Two hundred fifty volunteers from all over the US have come to Arlington National Cemetery to spruce up the grounds.

It's a quarter-million dollar project in its 10th year, sponsored by "Planet," the Professional Landcare Network.

Besides just beautifying the cemetery, the point of the event is to draw attention to immigration reform. Many landscaping businesses hire many or all of their laborers through the H2B guest worker program, which allows immigrants to work legally in the US up to 10 months a year.

The program is set to expire at the end of this year. Planet president John Gibson wants to change that, "We need to have action now. If we don't have an H2B in 2007, it will decimate a lot of small businesses in our industry."

While much of the focus of Congressional debate has been on illegal immigration, employers point out, many of these legal workers make huge sacrifices. Dowell says, "I've had gentlemen tell me when they go home to Mexico, their children don't know them. And when they get ready to leave, they go 'Dad, don't leave us.' So it's hard on them."

Monday, at a naturalization ceremony for three injured soldiers from Iraq, President Bush re-iterated his support, "We must create a temporary worker program that provides foreign workers a legal and orderly way to come into the country and do jobs Americans aren't doing."

As Congress deals with this political landmine four months before congressional elections, these workers are hoping to be heard - while honoring those who died to preserve the freedom they hope to share.

Posted 4:19pm by [Chantelle Janelle](#)