



Wilson fights for South Carolina seasonal businesses

Thursday, May 08, 2008

WASHINGTON – Congressman Joe Wilson (SC-02) submitted the following statement today during a hearing by the House Committee on Education and Labor entitled "Do Federal Programs Ensure U.S. Workers Are Recruited First Before Employers Hire From Abroad?"

"Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing. The American people are looking to Congress to address immigration reform, and they deserve a candid debate.

"Efforts by the federal government to enact immigration reform are long overdue. I speak for many in the district I represent when I say that Americans are justifiably opposed to any plan that opens the door to amnesty for illegal immigrants. However, they are just as disappointed that immigration programs that are beneficial to the community and American businesses are being ignored as well.

"One important example is the H-2B visa program. It has been very successful in boosting the tourism, restaurant, and hotel industries in my home state of South Carolina and in communities all around the country. It is a lawful and orderly way to provide a temporary seasonal workforce, and with many communities relying heavily on these types of industries, it is a program that supports the type of legal immigration reform we need.

"Unfortunately, last year, the returning-workers provision of the H-2B visa program expired. Without this provision, many workers are unable to secure visas to return on a yearly basis. In turn, businesses that rely on many of these returning workers are left to compete with an inadequate workforce.

"There are very real examples of this situation occurring in cities and towns all over America. In Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, many of the constituents I represent – including those who work for the Crowne Plaza Hilton Head Island Beach Resort, the Hilton Head Marriot Resort and Spa, the Hilton Ocean Front Resort and Spa, and the Westin Hilton Head Island Resort and Spa – have expressed their disappointment that Congress has let this provision expire without action. They all rely on a workforce that is comprised of legal immigrants who use H-2B visas to work seasonal jobs and complement full-time employees. These users and their employers must follow careful procedures ensuring that H-2B visa workers do not take jobs away from Americans, and they must follow strict immigration laws that are currently in place. They must also return home every year. Without an extension of the returning-worker provision, these businesses will be unable to provide the level of service their customers expect. They will be unable to grow their business to the benefit of the community and their employees.

"It is important to remember that an extension of the returning-worker provision is not an expansion of our immigration policy. We are not opening our borders to an unchecked stream of immigrants. The returning-worker provision of the H-2B visa program is a measured, lawful, and fair immigration policy, and it is a provision that was, up until last year, part of our immigration system. It needs to be authorized permanently.

"The H-2B visa program provides positive support to our economy – particularly in places reliant on seasonal tourism. A permanent extension of the returning-worker provision in the H-2B program will ensure local businesses in the Lowcountry of South Carolina and all around the United States can compete."