

H-2B Hearing on Capitol Hill Next Wednesday, April 16, 2008

The U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law will hold a hearing on the H-2B program next Wednesday, April 16, 2008, at 2:00 p.m. in room 2141 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

On April 1, the Southern Poverty Law Center held an H-2B briefing in the Rayburn House Office Building to present a negative view of the H-2B program with shocking stories from mistreated H-2B workers. An outcome of that meeting is a House Subcommittee Hearing planned for next Wednesday.

While there will be some witnesses testifying about the benefits and importance of the H-2B program, another purpose of the hearing is to allow opponents of the program to discuss the alleged abuses and what they perceive as the program's shortcomings. Subcommittee members are Chairman Lofgren (D-Calif.), Gutierrez (D-Ill.), Berman (D-Calif.), Jackson Lee (D-Tex), Waters (D-Calif.), Delahunt (D-Mass.), Sanchez (D-Calif.), Davis (D-Ala.), Ellison (D-Minn.), Weiner (D-N.Y.), ranking Republican King (R-Iowa), Gallegly (R-Calif.), Goodlatte (R-Va.), Lungren (R-Calif.), Forbes (R-Va.), and Gohmert (R-Tex.). Of these members, only Reps. Delahunt, Ellison, and Sanchez are co-sponsors of the "Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2007" (H.R. 1843). Some members of the committee are entirely focused on increased enforcement against employers employing illegal workers, without support for programs such as H-2B that provide access to legal labor.

While there will be hand-picked witnesses from both sides of the H-2B debate, we know this hearing is not necessarily a positive development in the fight for passage of H-2B legislation. We need to make as many of our points about the far more positive aspects of the program for the H-2B workers, employers,

American employees, and the economy. There will be limited space in the hearing room for attendees, and a line will probably form outside the hearing room, as is common for many hearings. If you can come to support those testifying on our behalf, it would be great, but be warned, you may not get into the hearing. You can always stop by your members' offices and tell them about the hearing and your vital need for H-2B workers.

Since the committee chair determines who gets to testify, we encourage you to call (202) 225-3121 and ask for your U.S. Representative. Please ask him or her to reach out to members of the committee to ensure our side gets a fair chance to make our points. It's important for us to show that these are isolated abuses that should be individually punished, but that should not result in any restrictions on an overwhelmingly beneficial program for both workers and employers. We can hope for positive, quick action on the program but must recognize that there are groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center that want to change the program in a way that would basically make the program unworkable.

If you can't attend but can get us testimonials, we can use them to show the positive nature of the program. We need two types of testimonials (please note that these will be entered into the record and publicly available, just as the testimony from the others will be entered). From H-2B employers, we need letters covering the following areas:

- How you feel about your H-2B workers
- How much you pay your H-2B workers
- Benefits you provide to your H-2B workers (transportation, housing, meals, time off)
- Living conditions of your H-2B workers while they work for you
- Any personal stories that you have of your H-2B workers
- Anything extra you may do for your H-2B workers (letters on birthdays, gifts, letters in off season, etc.)

From H-2B workers, we need handwritten testimonials detailing the following topics:

- Why the H-2B program is important to them (support family, learn job, etc.)
- How much they are paid
- Problems they face if they can't get an H-2B job
- What their living conditions are like while they're employed
- What are their working conditions like
- How they feel about their employer

Please send your testimonials to Tom Delaney at tomdelaney@landcarenetwork.org or via fax to 703-736-9668.

The H-2B issue continues to gain attention on Capitol Hill, as evidenced by legislation (S. 2839) introduced late today by Sen. Cornyn (R-Tex.) and others, that includes a temporary H-2B returning worker fix, provides H-1B relief, and would also reauthorize the E-verify program.

Your grassroots efforts are so important. Thank you for being involved.