Problem Solvers Caucus Endorses Landmark Bipartisan Agricultural Workers Bill

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Yesterday, the Problem Solvers Caucus announced its endorsement of H.R. 4916, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019, to provide earned visa status for Certified Agricultural Workers (CAWs) and provide ranchers and farmers a legal, reliable workforce. This bill specifically expands the H-2A foreign guest-worker program, so farmers can easily hire workers.

Problem Solvers Reps. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) and Fred Upton (R-MI) led the effort with Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-CA), all working closely with Representatives Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), chair of the House Judiciary Committee's immigration panel, as well as Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA) and stakeholders from the agricultural sector and labor. Over 200 organizations have come out in support of this legislation.

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In backing this initiative, the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, Co-Chaired by Representatives Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) and Tom Reed (R-NY), have come together to back American agriculture in this fix to their labor problems. The Caucus urges a floor vote on this legislation soon.

The bill takes a two-pronged approach to meet year-round labor needs: creating a new, capped program for employers seeking to bring in temporary workers for year-round needs; and builds off current law dedicating an additional 40,000 employment-based green cards per year for agricultural workers. It also includes mandatory e-verify, new investments in farmworker housing, H-2A wage reform, and streamlined recruiting.

Problem Solvers Caucus Co-Chair Congressman Tom Reed said, “I hear it every time I step on family farms in Upstate New York -- ‘when is Washington going to do something about access for farm labor?’ This common sense bipartisan compromise is a no brainer to this decades old problem, and will deliver relief to the farmers we care about across the nation to give them fair access to workers they need to prosper. I am proud the Problem Solvers Caucus could get behind this bill as we fight to push it over the finish line and onto the President’s desk.”

“This is a big win for bipartisan problem solving and a big win for America’s farmers. Even in these tumultuous times, the Problem Solvers Caucus continues to put America before party, and governing ahead of partisanship,” said Problem Solvers Caucus Co-Chair Congressman Josh Gottheimer. “The Farm Workforce Modernization Act will help ensure that our farmers have the reliable workforce they need, allowing them to grow their business and provide food to our families. We will continue to work with all agriculture stakeholders to help this bill become law.”

“For many years, farmers and farmworkers from the Central Coast to the center of America to the East Coast have faced continued uncertainty when it comes to agriculture labor. That is why for the past nine months, Democratic and Republican members of Congress, including members of the Problem Solvers Caucus, have been working tirelessly with farmers and farmworkers to craft a bipartisan solution,” said Legislation Co-Author Congressman Jimmy Panetta. “The Farm Workforce Modernization Act is a big, and bipartisan, step in the right direction that can provide certainty in our agriculture communities and confidence in our Congress.”

“I’m grateful for the Problem Solvers’ Caucus support for the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. As I have listened to local farmers across southwest Michigan and the nation, labor shortages are one of the most significant challenges they face year after year,” said Legislation Co-Author Congressman Fred Upton said. “American farmers feed the world, and for our farms to effectively produce quality agricultural products, we need to ensure there is a reliable workforce for all farms. That means we need real ag labor reform now that is fair and actually works for all concerned, including growers, producers, workers, and consumers.”

“My father was a farmworker, I spent summers working with him in the fields and I know firsthand how important the labor of those who harvest our food is to this nation,” said Legislation Co-Lead Congressman Salud Carbajal. “Agriculture is the number one industry in my district and I have heard
countless times from producers about the devastating labor shortage that stems from our broken immigration system. This groundbreaking bipartisan bill creates a lasting solution by providing earned legal status for our existing agricultural workforce, and modernizing the guest worker program to ensure long term industry sustainability that supports farmworkers and growers alike.”

“The bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act is the product of a tremendous collaborative effort that represents first real breakthrough on immigration in over six years. American agriculture is facing a labor crisis. A stable and legal workforce is desperately needed to ensure our nation’s farmers can continue to produce the best food in the world,” said Congressman Kurt Schrader. “This bill reforms the H2A program by reducing costs and bureaucracy for employers, improving working conditions and safeguards for farmworkers, and advances the legalization of our nation’s farmworkers and their families. This legislation is good for workers, good for farmers, and good for Oregon.”

“To keep our Central Virginia farms and greenhouses strong, we need to reform the existing H-2A program. Unfortunately, the current program provides little certainty to returning workers and their families, and I’ve heard firsthand from our district’s producers about the extensive red tape they face as they look to fill job openings,” said Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger. “Our bill—introduced by Republicans and Democrats—would provide much-needed changes to our immigration system and the H-2A program. By stabilizing the existing workforce, creating a new year-round guest worker program, charting a legal path to citizenship for farm laborers, and simplifying the process for agribusinesses, this bipartisan bill would address a portion of the immigration challenges facing our country and many of the employment challenges facing the Seventh District’s rural communities.”

“This bipartisan legislation was the product of months of negotiation between industry stakeholders and farmworker advocates. I would like to thank my friend, Congressman Panetta, for his strong leadership on this issue, which will benefit both farmers who depend on a stable, legal, and reliable workforce and workers who want to come out of the shadows and do their jobs without fear of the United States government,” said Congressman Tom Suozzi.

“I’ve heard from dairy farmers across Upstate New York that they need more skilled, qualified workers to help run their operations and get products on shelves,” said Congressman Anthony Brindisi. “Dairy farmers are a critical part of Upstate New York’s economy, and our broken immigration system hurts their ability to grow and hire. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act includes my commonsense, H2A Visa fix for dairy, has the support of Democrats and Republicans, and will help dairy farmers have the resources and workforce they need to succeed. This is a win for agriculture, a win for workers, and a win for independent, bipartisan problem solving.”

“Right now, our broken immigration system isn’t working for anyone — particularly our farmers who depend on temporary agricultural workers,” Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin said. “This is a consistent issue I’ve heard about from farmers across our district, and I’m so proud to join my colleagues in introducing a bipartisan bill that creates year-round access to the H-2A visa program for dairy and other agricultural sectors that desperately need workers but have previously been unable to utilize the program. Formed in bipartisan collaboration, this bill is proof positive that we can and must find areas of common ground when it comes to immigration reform — and when we do, our local businesses, our communities and our economy are stronger as a result.”

“I’m proud to support the bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act which will provide year-round certainty to farmers across our nation,” said Congressman Paul Mitchell. “Our nation’s agricultural industry supports millions of families and this bill updates an outdated workforce system to ensure our nation’s farmers and producers continue to have the workforce they need to feed the world and contribute to the American economy.”
“Most people in Washington couldn’t tell you which end of the cow the milk comes out of or where almonds come from – so it’s no surprise that the immigration laws on the books were not written with the needs of our ag community and farmworkers in mind,” said Congressman Josh Harder. “We have a bipartisan solution here that will give folks a chance to get right with the law, give our farmers certainty in their workforce, and make sure we’re addressing the needs of our dairy farmers in the H-2A program. It also gives folks who work hard in the fields and contribute to our communities a chance to come out of the shadows and earn a path to citizenship.”

Background:

Farmers and ranchers across the United States are in desperate need of a high-quality, reliable workforce, and the current H-2A guest worker program is in need of meaningful, bipartisan reform. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act creates a workforce solution for America’s agriculture industry by providing stability and predictability to one of the most critical sectors of our nation’s economy.

The bill will:

- Establish a program for agricultural workers in the United States to **earn legal status through continued agricultural employment** and contribution to the U.S. agricultural economy.
- **Reform the H-2A program to provide more flexibility for employers**, while ensuring critical protections for workers. The bill focuses on modifications to make the program more responsive and user-friendly for employers and **provides access to the program for industries with year-round labor needs**.
- Establish **mandatory, nationwide E-Verify system for all agricultural employment** with a structured phase-in and guaranteed due process for authorized workers who are incorrectly rejected by the system.

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The Problem Solvers Caucus is a bipartisan group in Congress comprising of 48 members – equally divided between Democrats and Republicans – who are committed to forging bipartisan cooperation on key issues. It is co-chaired by Congressman Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) and Congressman Tom Reed (R-NY).

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