Senators Introduce Bipartisan Legislation To Improve H-2B Visa Program

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Yesterday, Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Mark Warner (D-VA), and Dr. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) introduced the bipartisan *Save our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2015*, legislation that focuses on substantive reforms aimed to help seasonal employers better navigate the H-2B temporary non-agricultural visa program. The legislation would increase certainty for business, allowing seasonal employers to better prepare for fluctuations in demand.

The H-2B program is vital to small and seasonal employers across the country who depend on temporary workers to sustain their businesses and supplement their existing American workforce. This bipartisan legislation would streamline the program to eliminate ambiguities and establish clear parameters for employers hiring H-2B workers, require increased coordination between federal agencies, and bring transparency to the program operations for greater efficiency while ensuring American workers are not displaced.

"Across North Carolina and the country, seasonal employers have been unfairly facing bureaucratic barriers through the H-2B program, to the point where they are not even sure if they can continue to stay in business," **said Senator Tillis.** *"This bipartisan legislation will not only help alleviate the stress and frustrations our business owners face within the H-2B program, but will continue to place a priority on both the American workforce and our local economies."*

"Maryland's seafood industry is critical for jobs on the Eastern Shore and for our way of life. From harvesting crabs to shucking oysters, temporary and seasonal workers ensure Maryland's seafood industry continues to prosper," **Senator Mikulski said.** *"I have consistently fought for an approach to the H-2B program that recognizes that one size does not fit all, protects the jobs and wages of workers, and provides the certainty small businesses need to survive. The legislation provides certainty and ends unnecessary hardships in order to support Maryland jobs. Our seafood businesses deserve a government on their side."*

"This legislation makes modest and measured reforms to the H-2B visa program, which is of such vital importance to our seafood communities across the Chesapeake Bay. Improving the H-2B program, while still ensuring that Americans get first crack at jobs, not only keeps Virginia's seafood companies in business, it helps boost the local economies on the Bay and protects American workers – from watermen to crab pickers to truck drivers – who rely on a thriving Virginia seafood industry," **said Senator Warner.**

The introduction of this bipartisan effort comes after employers have faced several road blocks navigating the H-2B process this year, including a suspension of the program that left many business owners shut out of the process. In addition to the bill, earlier this week a group of 26 Senators [sent a bipartisan letter](#) to the Department of Labor expressing concern and frustration over the Department's H-2B labor certification process.

About the H-2B Program:

The H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Visa Program allows U.S. employers to hire immigrant workers during peak seasons to supplement the existing American workforce. Employers are required to declare that there were not enough U.S. workers who were available to do the temporary work. The number of H-2B visas is typically capped at 66,000 per year by the Department of Homeland Security. The H-2B program not only helps employers sustain their businesses during seasonal fluctuations in demand, but subsequently supports additional American jobs dependent upon seasonal business industries.

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