

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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Dream Act and TPS Bills Advance in the House

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Industry ADVOCATES: AmericanHort

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On May 22, the House Judiciary Committee approved the “Dream Act of 2019” (H.R. 2820). The bill would extend legal status and create a path to citizenship for many who were brought to the United States illegally as children. Legal status would be granted to persons who’ve been continuously physically present in the U.S. for at least four years before enactment, came to the U.S. before turning 18, meet certain educational or military service requirements and have not committed certain crimes.

The committee also passed “The American Promise Act” (H.R. 2821), which would grant permanent resident status to immigrants who were covered by temporary protected status (TPS) as of January 1, 2017 and who’ve been continuously physically present in the U.S. for at least three years. Also, the committee passed the “The Venezuela TPS Act” (H.R. 549), which would grant temporary protected status for an 18-month period to Venezuelans who have been continuously physically present the time that the bill is enacted.

All three bills passed along a predominately party line vote. Republicans argued that Congress must first address border security and the migrant crisis at the U.S. border with Mexico before addressing other immigration issues.

These actions are relevant to our industry for several reasons. First, some in our industry have employees who were granted work authorization under the Obama-era “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (or DACA) program and would have a chance to legalize if H.R. 2820 passed. Many others, especially in the landscape sector, have employees with TPS. Finally, action on these bills clears the way for Judiciary Committee work on an agricultural workforce reform package. Negotiations continue on that front; AmericanHort is directly involved in this effort.

In the Senate, Judiciary Committee chairman Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) introduced a Senate version of the Dream Act (S. 784) on March 26. It has also garnered the support of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sens. Murkowski (R-AK), Gardner (R-CO) and Cortez-Masto (D-NV). While a key supporter of the Dream Act, Senator Graham has said that Congress should address the crisis at our southern border before addressing legal status for the “dreamers.” He’s drafting an immigration bill that would change asylum laws and expand detention of migrants to 100 days in response to the situation at the southern U.S. border.

—Craig Regelbrugge, VP of Government Relations & Research, AmericanHort

Legislation Introduced to Radically Increase Estate Tax

A bill that would dramatically increase estate taxes has been introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). S. 309 is titled the “For the 99.8 Percent Act.”

Sen. Sanders asserts that “only 0.2% of Americans” have estates that are valued over \$3.5 million. In response, he introduced S. 309, stating he felt that “from a moral, economic and political perspective, our nation will not thrive when so few have so much and so many have so little.”

Under tax reform enacted in 2017, the first \$11.4 million per person and \$22.8 million per couple would be exempt from the federal estate tax. The portion above those levels is subject to a 40% tax rate. That provision will expire at the end of 2025 and will revert to its pre-reform levels of \$5 million per person adjusted for cost of living increases if it’s not extended or changed.

S. 309 would make the following changes to the 40% estate tax rate:

- 45% on the value of an estate between \$3.5 million and \$10 million
- 50% on the value of an estate between \$10 million and \$50 million
- 55% on the value of an estate in excess of \$50 million
- 77% on the value of an estate in excess of \$1 billion

Only Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) has co-sponsored S. 309 and it currently has no companion bill in the House.

Meanwhile, the Senate Republican leadership introduced S. 215, the Death Tax Repeal Act, to repeal estate taxes outright. That bill has 32 co-sponsors in the Senate and three similar bills have been introduced in the House.

Like S. 309, S. 215 has little chance of becoming law given the current split control of Congress. However, the situation may change after the 2020 elections.

—Shawn McBurney, Senior Director—Government Relations, SAF

Going to Bat for the Horticultural Specialties Census

In response to a request for public input, AmericanHort and the Society of American Florists filed official comments in support of continuing the Census of Horticultural Specialties. The comments pointed out that since 1889, data collected and presented by the Census of Horticultural Specialties have been a valuable resource to the floriculture and nursery industry.

The industry represents one-third of the value of specialty crop production in the U.S. This Census is one of the most valued sources of industry insights. In addition to industry, the information included in the report is routinely used by government agencies, academia, media and the general public. The comments went on to recommend several crop additions and other technical improvements.

—Craig Regelbrugge



AmericanHort Joins Delegations From Oregon & Florida

The AmericanHort advocacy team was glad to partner in May with leadership delegations from the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) and the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA) to raise Congressional awareness of our key shared federal priorities.

Pictured: AmericanHort and the Oregon Association of Nurseries met with Congressman Austin Scott (R-GA, middle) to thank him for the introduction of the Agricultural Trucking Relief Act of 2019—a top

legislative priority for the horticulture industry in the 116th Congress.

Joined by members of the AmericanHort team, these state delegations met with Senate and House lawmakers to discuss the important issues affecting the horticulture industry. Issues discussed included the need for workforce stability and labor solutions, the Social Security Administration's recently reimplemented "No Match Letters," and the need for legislation like the Agricultural Trucking Relief Act (H.R. 1673) to provide regulatory uniformity when shipping horticultural products.

Since the meeting, two additional representatives have co-sponsored the trucking bill—Reps. Gregory Steube (R-FL) and Trent Kelly (R-MS). The joint lobbying efforts also cultivated support from both sides of the aisle for a soon-to-be-released Senate companion trucking bill. **GT**

—Tristan Daedalus, Director of Advocacy & Political Communications, AmericanHort