

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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Governor Larry Hogan Set as the Keynote for Impact Washington

Jennifer Zurko

I previously encouraged you to save the date for this year's Impact Washington, a legislative summit that's being held by AmericanHort September 18-20. More event details have emerged, including one very interesting and exciting note—former Maryland governor Larry Hogan will be this year's keynote speaker. Governor Hogan served two-terms after pulling an upset election in 2014 and becoming only the second Republican governor Maryland has ever had.

His tenure focused on bipartisanship and solving common problems. And because of his moderate approach and willingness to work with the majority Democratic state legislature, he departed after his term was up with a very high approval rating across all parties.

"If you have grown weary—or even cynical—of all things political, you will find Governor Hogan's message uplifting and inspirational," Cole Mangum, vice president for operations at Bell Nursery, Elkridge, Maryland, and immediate past AmericanHort board chair said in a press release. "We thrived under his vision and leadership, and are thrilled that Governor Hogan will join us in September to share his observations, experience and vision with AmericanHort and green industry leaders from across our nation."

The Impact Washington Summit includes a program of presentations and discussions on important policy issues that impact the horticulture industry and pre-arranged meetings on Capitol Hill among participants and their members of Congress. More details on additional program speakers will be announced in the coming weeks.

For more information and to register for Impact Washington, go to AmericanHort.org/IWSummit.

—JZ

Dignity Act of 2023 Introduced

In late May, Representatives Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL) and Veronica Escobar (D-TX) introduced the Dignity Act of 2023. The Act is a revised version of an immigration reform package that was previewed at the 2021 AmericanHort Impact Washington legislative summit. The bill seeks to address border security, border infrastructure, citizenship,

asylum system reforms and expanded legal immigration/temporary worker programs. It would create a path to citizenship for “Dreamers,” undocumented immigrants who entered the country as children. It would also establish a program to allow other undocumented immigrants to legally live and work in the country if they pay restitution. The measure would also revise existing H-2 programs, with provisions, including:

- Streamlines the H-2A application process by allowing employers to file with relevant agencies in a single platform
- Removes “seasonal” requirements on the H-2A program and expands eligibility to year-round production employment needs
- Repeals the Labor Department’s Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) methodology, instead requiring employers to pay not less than 125% of the federal minimum wage or the applicable state/local minimum wage
- Allows “staggered entry” so employers can have workers arrive over time as needs build
- Creates a Certified Agricultural Worker (CAW) program, as proposed in the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, with renewable five-and-a-half year visas, available to unauthorized workers with a substantial prior work history in agriculture

The Dignity Act includes language from H.R. 3897, the Returning Worker Exemption Act of 2021, which features a permanent “returning worker exemption” with a three-year look-back. While the bill faces an uncertain future, Rep. Salazar reported that she plans to meet with Republican leadership and is open to exploring different procedural avenues for the bill to move forward. AmericanHort and the Ag Workforce Coalition steering committee applauded the bipartisan effort and look forward to engaging as the process continues.

—Sara Neagu-Reed, Director, Advocacy & Government Affairs, AmericanHort

Plant Health and Trade Regulatory Updates

On the plant health and trade front, we report on one recent “win” and one issue to watch.

First, the good news: In the spring, USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) indicated it would restrict young plant imports of species in the genera *leucanthemum* and *argyranthemum* due to their taxonomic status as “synonyms of” *chrysanthemum*, a genus long regulated mainly for *chrysanthemum* white rust (*Puccinia horiana*).

Data provided to AmericanHort courtesy of the National Garden Bureau documented that young plants of these two genera imported in recent years supported U.S. finished plant production conservatively valued at roughly \$30 million annually (wholesale) in recent years. Coupled with the long history of importation of these genera, and a productive dialogue with the agency on taxonomic and pest risk considerations, APHIS decided not to proceed.

Separately, APHIS has informed AmericanHort that the agency intends to categorize Chili Pepper Mild Mottle Virus (CPMMoV) as a quarantine pest, enabling the agency to reject consignments if and when this relatively novel virus is encountered in the commodity inspection process. The virus was first detected in 2022 on calibrachoa.

—Craig Regelbrugge, Executive VP of Advocacy, Research & Industry Relations, AmericanHort

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