

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

8/1/2024

FY2025 LHHS Subcommittee Markups

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The subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies conducted a markup of the Fiscal Year 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The bill was approved by a voice vote. The bill, as passed, amounts to 11% below the current funding at a total of \$185.8 billion. Subcommittee Chair Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL-04) praised the bill for reducing funding to diversity, equity, inclusion, Planned Parenthood, and

biomedical research programs in China. He argued that these cuts allow more funding for rural America and early childhood education. Full Committee Chair Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK-04) emphasized bipartisan cooperation. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD-5) criticized the subcommittee markups as rubber stamps, lacking meaningful debate or compromise. No amendments were proposed or debated on the actual appropriation of funds. The proposed package includes a \$8.5 billion cut for the Department of Health and Human Services and a 23% reduction for the Labor Department.

The bill includes key H-2A and H-2B provisions, such as:

H-2A: Key provisions that will bring desperately needed relief to farmers who rely on the H-2A program to meet their labor needs. These provisions are vital to bringing much needed certainty to our members that have faced unpredictable increases in costs for labor and a wave of rule making that has left their future up in the air. By including this language, the Subcommittee has demonstrated its commitment to keeping American agriculture in business.

H-2B: Allowing for staggered crossing for seafood workers, allowing for a 10-month season as opposed to the regulation's nine months, prohibiting the Department of Labor from enforcing the 3/4 guarantee and corresponding employment provisions of its regulations; and allowing for the use of prevailing wage surveys.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

Groups Strip Helpful H-2B Language

The H-2B Workforce Coalition, of which AmericanHort is on the Steering Committee, expressed deep disappointment as a bipartisan amendment to the FY 2025 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill was

removed without notice and sent a letter voicing our frustration with the process. While no amendment was filed to strip the H-2B amendment from the bill, House Judiciary Chair Jim Jordan (R-OH-04), Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX-21) and the House Freedom Caucus led a successful effort to pull out our language—without a vote, amendment or discussion before the bill went to the Rules Committee.

Groups like NumbersUSA actively opposed the bill's H-2B language. This is the second appropriations process in a row where far-right members of Congress and groups pulled out helpful and meaningful fixes to the H-2B program. The House passed this bill on June 28 by a vote of 212-203.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

House Appropriations Bills Move

In July, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment and Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies held the subcommittee markups for its respective FY 2025 appropriations bills. Both bills passed the subcommittee level and will now be considered for markup by the full committee.

The Interior and Environment bill funds the EPA and the Department of Interior. The EPA's budget is set to be reduced by 20%. Details on the allocation for the Office of Pesticide Programs was determined by the Full Committee on July 10. The bill includes \$1.58 billion for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is \$144.4 million below the FY24 enacted level and \$307.8 million below the President's Budget Request. The bill aims to prevent chemical and pesticide manufacturers from being overburdened with requirements that could drive business overseas and threaten American competitiveness. It also limits the abuse of the Endangered Species Act and prohibits multiple U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rulings from weaponizing the Endangered Species Act against land users and energy producers.

The Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies bill allocates \$59.190 billion, which is \$999 million above the FY 2024 enacted amount and \$139 million below the President's Budget Request. Some of the bills' focus are mandating transparency in the Biden Administration's implementation of WOTUS and Sackett v. EPA, rejecting efforts to undermine water supply security in California, and prioritizing projects to increase water supply and support drought response. The budget includes \$125.5 million for rural water projects, \$134 million for water storage projects and \$211.2 million for activities related to the Reclamation Safety of Dams Act.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

Farmworker Housing Bill Vetoed in Sunshine State

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed legislation backed by a coalition of agricultural groups that would have preempted local restrictions inhibiting the construction of farmworker housing. Local sources report that DeSantis signaled concerns that the policy would spur the hiring of undocumented workers at Florida farms.

Actually, the reverse is likely true. In recent years, statistics reveal that roughly half of the current hired farm workforce is believed to be unauthorized. Many growers are turning to H-2A as the only reliable source for legal, vetted workers. Yet, a lack of housing options is often the biggest impediment to using the federal visa program. "Not in my backyard" opposition (or "NIMBY-ism") often stymies agricultural employers' efforts to build new housing. The bill had the support of the state agriculture commissioner, and notably, it passed the legislature without opposition. Alas, a lost opportunity for an industry that is a pillar of the Florida economy.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

*News, views, commentary and event coverage about the policies and legislation that directly affect our industry.
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