GROWERTALKS

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JZ on D.C.

Jennifer Zurko

Funding Fight Over ICE Practices Could Disrupt Seasonal Worker Processing

The controversy after two separate fatal shootings in Minneapolis, Minnesota, significantly increased the political pressure for Republicans, as it spilled into budget negotiations. As of press time, the House had just passed the budget bill that was sent back to the chamber from the Senate after Republican Senators agreed to strip out the full-year Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget that was in the original House bill, replacing it with a two-week patch that gives Democrats time to negotiate with the White House.

Democratic leaders, the White House and congressional Republicans will have to negotiate about what, if any, policy changes they're willing to codify into law as part of a long-term bill. Republicans are open to some changes, including requiring independent investigations, but they've already dismissed some of Democrats' main demands, including requiring judicial warrants for immigration arrests.

For employers who rely on predictable seasonal labor through programs like H-2A and H-2B, any disruption in DHS appropriations could slow visa processing, delay worker arrivals and complicate planning for peak production periods. The potential ripple effects extend beyond paperwork and timelines. AmericanHort is closely tracking these developments to keep members informed and has met with the White House, USDA, the Department of Labor and DHS on this subject.

—JZ; Additional sources: Frida Mendez, DCLRS, and Matt Mika, AmericanHort

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A Member of Congress Pays a Visit to Ball

In January, Rep. Delia Ramirez (D-IL-3) stopped by Ball Horticultural Company's headquarters in West Chicago. This was the congresswoman's first time visiting Ball since she was elected in 2018 and Illinois' congressional map was re-drawn, which put the company within her district.



From left to right: Dr. Marvin Miller, Cheni Filios, Al Davidson, me, Rep. Delia Ramirez, Susannah Ball, Anna Ball, Cat Blaney and Alan Rouse.

Representatives from Ball have had many meetings with the congresswoman at her office in Washington, D.C., since her first term and establishing that relationship laid the groundwork to inviting her for a formal visit. While in her district during recess, Rep. Ramirez was able to make time for a brief meeting and tour around the Ball facility.

Rep. Ramirez has been a good sounding board for many of Ball's concerns as a global company, asking at one point during the meeting, "How can I help you?" The discussion touched on key issues that affect Ball and its customers, including tariffs, free trade, and labor and immigration enforcement.

The congresswoman also told us about a new committee where she's one of the co-founders and co-chairs, called the Congressional Caucus on Global Migration. The goal is to better identify and understand the factors that cause forced migration, and pinpoint solutions on how to address these issues. Immigration reform always tends to focus on what happens when the migrants get here—their hope is to learn more about the reasons why they are forced to leave their home countries and find ways to alleviate those pressures.





During the last part of the visit, Rep. Ramirez got the quick “nickel tour” of two areas in Ball’s facility: Ball Helix, where she looked inside the tissue culture lab and learned about the pathology services, and the Seed Distribution Center, where she got to walk through the seed packing area and see the new Perfect Pick system in action. She even got to hold a newly arrived bag of petunia seed waiting to be sorted and packaged.

Since her visit was during the middle of a very frigid winter, another invitation was extended to come back during the summer to see the Ball Gardens and walk through the greenhouses. The goal is to keep the lines of communication open and maintain the relationship with the congresswoman and her staff as she continues to help support Ball’s interests as a constituent and business leader in her district.
—JZ

Rep. Ramirez taking a tour through the Seed Distribution Center.

The congresswoman got to hold a newly arrived bag of petunia seed that was waiting to be sorted and packaged.

News, views, commentary and event coverage about the policies and legislation that directly affect our industry. Share your thoughts, opinions and news with me: jzurko@ballpublishing.com.