GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

12/1/2017

Agricultural Guest Worker Act Squeaks Out of Committee

Chris Beytes

In a 17-16 vote in late October, the House Judiciary Committee approved H.R. 4092, the Agricultural Guest Worker Act (AG Act), says Craig Regelbrugge of AmericanHort. This bill would create a new agricultural guestworker program, called H-2C, administered by the Department of Agriculture and designed to cover year-round employees. It would replace the Department of Labor's existing H-2A visa program, which provides seasonal, temporary workers.

Under the proposed AG Act bill, 450,000 visas will be available each year for H-2C workers (roughly 200,000 H-2A petitions were granted for 2017). Returning H-2A workers and previously unauthorized workers who participate legally in the new program won't count toward the annual visa limit.

One change to the bill that took place during the hearing was an amendment offered by Rep. Karen Handel (R-GA) that eliminates the ability of current unauthorized workers to pursue H-2C status prior to their required departure from the country. "In other words, they need to 'self-deport' prior to any opportunity to even apply (let alone receive) H -2C non-immigrant status," Craig explained to me.

The next stop for the bill is the House, but there's serious concern about if it can pass the House in its current form. **GT**