

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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AmericanHort's New Legislative Advocate

Jennifer Zurko



AmericanHort announced in October it hired Evan Lee as Director, Policy and Government Relations. Previously, Evan served as Chief of Staff for the Office of Congressional Relations for the USDA, acting as the principal deputy for the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations. In this role, he directed development and advancement of the Department's strategic legislative goals and advised the Secretary on pending legislation and policy matters applicable to the Department's leadership in agriculture and natural resources management, food safety, and COVID pandemic relief and response. Prior to that, he was Legislative Director for Congressman Neal P. Dunn, M.D. (FL-02) and Legislative Assistant for Congressman Daniel Webster (FL-10). In these roles, he led policy and legislative programs in agriculture, labor, energy and environmental issues.

In conjunction with Evan coming on board, AmericanHort has promoted Tal Coley to Senior Director, Advocacy and Government Affairs, recognizing his growing impact on association priorities of transportation, infrastructure and tax, among other key issues. In his tenure at AmericanHort, he's led successful issue campaigns that have created significant value for our industry and helped expand AmericanHort's advocacy reach. Tal is their key liaison with strategic partner K-Coe Isom and was the project lead on their Impact Washington Summit in September. He also serves as Executive Director of the Nursery and Landscape Association Executives (NLAE), which AmericanHort serves as managing partner.

Craig Regelbrugge has been promoted to Executive Vice President – Advocacy, Research and Industry Relations, as AmericanHort recognizes his unparalleled contributions to the organization and our industry. While Craig's key focus areas continue to be labor, workforce and immigration policy—as well as plant health and trade—he's an industry leader with expertise on just about every other legislative and regulatory issue affecting our industry. Craig's promotion will allow him to focus more time on strategic advocacy programs and assisting to solve member issues.

"This is an effort to recognize the growing effectiveness of our advocacy capabilities at AmericanHort over the past couple of years," said Ken Fisher, CEO of AmericanHort. "Craig's influence and standing in D.C. continues to put AmericanHort in the middle of every important advocacy issue for our industry. The work Craig and Tal did for the

industry during the pandemic kept our supply chains open, helped our members navigate changing workplace rules and ensured our member companies had access to the available COVID stimulus programs.

“Tal’s growth on industry issues and member relations has allowed us to continue to expand our issues management. We are excited to be able to hire someone with the policy and legislative experience that Evan brings to AmericanHort.” —JZ

H-2B First-Half Cap Hit; Call for Grassroots Action

First, the bad news: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has received enough petitions to reach the congressionally mandated cap on H-2B visas for temporary nonagricultural workers for the first half of FY 2022. September 30, 2022 was the final receipt date for new cap-subject H-2B worker petitions requesting an employment start date before April 1, 2022. USCIS will continue to accept H-2B petitions that are exempt from the mandated cap, such as current H-2B workers in the United States who extend their stay, change employers, or change the terms and conditions of their employment.

In response to the “earlier-than-ever” first half cap being hit, the H-2B Workforce Coalition, which AmericanHort co-chairs, sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh asking for additional visas to be released.

Now, the better news: On the appropriations front, the House Appropriations Committee passed its version of the Fiscal 2022 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill over the summer. The bill contains language stating the Department of Homeland Security “shall” release additional H-2B visas if it determines that the needs of seasonal businesses cannot be met with U.S. workers.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has recently released draft versions of several Fiscal 2022 appropriations bills, including the bills to fund the Departments of Homeland Security and Labor. The draft Senate DHS Appropriations bill contains the same discretionary language that’s been included in the law for the past several years.

This language is significant because it marks the first time in several years that the Senate included cap relief language in its version of the DHS bill. The fact that there’s a cap relief provision in both the House and Senate bills bodes well for a successful outcome in a final spending package. The federal government had been operating under a temporary spending measure that was set to expire on December 3. With the appropriations process’ unpredictability, there may be a need to pass another short-term spending bill before Congress completes action on a final spending package for the remainder of fiscal 2022.

Meanwhile, we urge all members to send a grassroots message to Congress calling for their support for H-2B cap relief. More details and a way to offer your support can be found at takeaction.americanhort.org/landing-pages/h2bvisas.

—Laurie Flanagan, Chair of the H-2B Workforce Coalition, and Craig Regelbrugge, Executive VP – Advocacy, Research & Industry Relations, AmericanHort

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