

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 8, 2016
Laura Kunkle
Communications & Media Relations Specialist
LauraK@AmericanHort.org
614-884-1137 Direct

AmericanHort Testimony Defends Importance of H-2B Program

Columbus, Ohio – Today, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest held a hearing titled, “**The H-2B Temporary Foreign Worker Program: Examining the Effects on Americans’ Job Opportunities and Wages.**” The Committee chairman, Jeff Sessions (R-AL), invited a panel of union, worker advocate, and immigration restrictionists who presented a hostile picture of the program as a threat to American workers and wages.

Fortunately, one witness, Dr. Stephen Bronars of Edgeworth Economics, expressed a sharply divergent view. Bronars, the former head of the Economics Department at the University of Texas at Austin, testified as follows:

“There should be little disagreement about the economic impact of the H-2B visa program. This program allows non-agricultural U.S. employers to alleviate some seasonal labor shortages by hiring foreign-born temporary workers. In my opinion, the H-2B program benefits small businesses, workers, and consumers in the U.S. Scaling back the H-2B program will have a deleterious effect on revenue, employment, and wages in some seasonal industries. In contrast, an increase in the number of H-2B visas that can be issued each year would benefit workers, consumers, and small businesses in the U.S.”

In recent years, Bronars has advised AmericanHort and the Agriculture Coalition for Immigration Reform on wage and other economic considerations, especially during the negotiation of S.744, the immigration bill that passed the U.S. Senate in 2013.

On June 14, the House Appropriations Committee is expected to consider its 2017 fiscal year funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security. Last year, the committee included the H-2B returning worker exemption as a policy rider on its bill. This policy helped many landscape industry and other employers to avoid a train wreck this spring when the H-2B cap was hit. The returning worker exemption also provides an incentive for temporary, seasonal workers to respect the rule of law, and abide by the terms of their visa, returning home when the work is done.

Presenting a unified front, AmericanHort and the National Association of Landscape Professionals submitted [joint written testimony](#) for the hearing. AmericanHort urges horticulture industry members to let their Representatives in the House know of the importance of the H-2B program in our industry, and to support continuation of the returning worker exemption in the coming year.

“The helping hands of temporary and seasonal H-2B workers lift up the job security and success of thousands upon thousands of American workers employed in industries like horticulture and landscaping,” said Craig Regelbrugge, AmericanHort senior vice president. “Rather than scapegoating a program that works, Congress should recognize its benefits, and get on with the business of modernizing America’s immigration and visa programs in the interest of the economy.”

###

AmericanHort was formed in 2014 by the consolidation of the American Nursery & Landscape Association and OFA – The Association of Horticulture Professionals. With a combined history of 220+

years, AmericanHort supports nearly 16,000 member and affiliated businesses that include breeders, greenhouse and nursery growers, garden retailers, distributors, interior and exterior landscape professionals, florists, students, educators, researchers, manufacturers, and all of those who are part of the industry market chain. The horticulture industry's production, wholesale, retail, and landscape service components have annual sales of \$163 billion, and sustain over 1.15 million full- and part-time jobs. Our mission is to unite, promote, and advance the horticulture industry through advocacy, collaboration, connectivity, education, market development, and research. The association has offices in Columbus, Ohio for administration and member services, and in Washington, DC to facilitate government relations and research activities.