

## Our City

The heavy lift is never easy. The heavy lift requires a huge degree of coordination and support. The heavy lift is not something that most are comfortable in attempting; usually because it's just plain hard. But, sometimes the heavy lift just has to get done because it helps everyone. In light of our national inability to address immigration and so much of the country's labor force dependent on immigrant labor six United States Representatives, a State Senator and others are attempting two heavy lifts.

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 18, 2019 – over 300 agriculture groups sent a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy in support of H.R. 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, a bipartisan bill spearheaded by Reps. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA-19), Dan Newhouse (R-WA-04), **Mike Simpson (R-ID-02)**, Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-20), Doug LaMalfa (R-CA-01), and Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL-25). *“As foreign producers take advantage of our labor shortage and gain market share, America will export not only our food production but also thousands of these farm-dependent jobs. Securing a reliable and skilled workforce is essential, not only for the agriculture industry but for the U.S. economy as a whole,”* reads the letter. The bipartisan effort was negotiated over several months with input from agricultural stakeholders and labor organizations and was introduced with the support of 26 Democrats and 23 Republicans.

Title I of the legislation, Earned Legalization for Certified Agricultural Workers, states that this title establishes a program for agricultural workers in the United States (and their spouses and minor children) to earn legal status through continued agricultural employment and contribution to the U.S. agricultural economy. Applicants must show at least 180 days of agricultural employment over the last two years. Qualified applicants are provided 5-year renewable agriculture visas. Individuals can renew their 5-year visas by working at least 100 days in agriculture each year. Further, qualified individuals have the opportunity to but are not required to, earn Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status.

You can learn more about the proposed legislation at Representative Simpson's home page (<https://simpson.house.gov/>). You may recall last spring I had the opportunity to visit with Representative Simpson while I was in Washington DC as the Idaho 2019 Teacher of the Year about immigration and the deleterious effect that the constant threat of deportation has on my students, their families and the employers of their parents. Shortly upon returning I began meeting with local farmers, business persons and immigrants. In July a meeting was held with Senator Jim Guthrie, Senator Mark Nye, Representative Kevin Andrus, Lance and Monte Funk, Greg Anderson, Ritchie and Will Toevs, Ana Rowe, Blanca Mendez and others to discuss what Idaho could do as a State to address part of the threat to so many of our community members and employers.

As a result of that meeting Senator Guthrie has been drafting and coordinating State legislation that if successful would provide Driving Privilege Cards for undocumented residents. Driving Privilege Cards? Undocumented workers cannot legal drive in Idaho; but, as Greg Anderson points out most of Idaho, especially, agricultural communities lack public transportation so all employees have to drive to and from work or wherever else they need to go. Utah, Nevada, California and Washington along with eight other states have already passed similar legislation

making it still harder to keep good employees here in Idaho. Allowing undocumented residents the ability to drive legally just like Representative Simpson's Farm Workforce Modernization Act makes sense for a state whose economy is so dependent on an immigrant workforce. Like Simpson's Federal legislation the Driving Privilege Card draft legislation has broad grassroots support; the heavy lift will be getting the decision makers to see and agree on the value this essential workforce and residents add to not only our economy but to so many of our communities across this state.

I am looking forward to coordinating and supporting Senator Guthrie and Representative Simpson as they prepare for the heavy lift. More details on both legislative efforts will be forthcoming in this column and from the 2020 FFA Ag Issues team. Watch this space or better yet let me know if you are interested in helping with the heavy lift.

Until next week...