



American Horse Council Washington Update

UPDATE ON IMMIGRATION

Congress recessed for the November elections without passing comprehensive immigration reform; but it also did not pass the broad, restrictive legislation favored by the House of Representatives.

In the good-news category, those Senators and Representatives concerned with the problems of businesses wishing to employ foreign workers in the H-2B visa program were able to pass a one-year extension to the current law that attempts to resolve the problems caused by the current cap on such workers.

H-2B Visas

Just prior to leaving town, Congress passed the conference report on the Department of Defense Authorization bill, which included language extending the exemption for H-2B workers for one-year through 2007. The President is expected to sign the bill shortly.

The language was originally an amendment, sponsored by Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and was included as part of the Iraq/Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations bill last year. The amendment, the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act, made significant changes to the federal H-2B (non-skilled seasonal worker) visa program that resulted in saving thousands of small businesses around the country.

The Mikulski amendment will ease the problems caused by the enforcement of the 66,000 cap on H-2B visas. The change exempts from the cap any alien who received an H-2B visa in the past three years, although an employer must certify that the worker received such a visa. The new provision applies for the next fiscal year, which extends through September 30, 2007.

The horse industry uses the H-2B program to bring semi-skilled workers into the U.S. for non-agricultural jobs. Many trainers, training facilities, horse shows and other service providers in the industry rely on these workers to fill jobs American don't want.

The AHC strongly supported this extension that will allow the horse industry to continue to employ necessary foreign workers in non-agricultural positions

Secure Fence Act

In addition, the Senate approved the Secure Fence Act, a measure to authorize the construction of a 700-mile double-layered fence along the US-Mexican Border. The bill passed overwhelming 80 to 19, with one Senator not voting. The House passed the bill earlier this year. President Bush has indicated he will sign the bill into law.