

MINUTES
HOUSE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 02, 2012
TIME: 1:30 P.M.
PLACE: Room EW20
MEMBERS: Chairman Andrus, Vice Chairman Boyle, Representative(s) Lake, Stevenson, Trail, Bolz, Shirley, Patrick, McMillan, Batt, Pence, Lacey
**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Representative(s) Lake
GUESTS: Brent Olmstead, Coalition for Immigration Reform; Kent Lauer, Idaho Farm Bureau
MOTION: **Rep. McMillan** made a motion to approve the minutes of Thursday, January 26, 2012. **Motion carried by voice vote.**
MOTION: **Rep. McMillan** made a motion to approve the minutes of Monday, January 30, 2012. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

Brent Olmstead, Idaho Business Coalition for Immigration Reform, said in this presentation he will explain what immigration laws do and give a refresher on the H-2A program. He said he will refer to several states that have passed immigration reform laws and explain what they are and what they have in common.

Mr. Olmstead said one of the main problems in agriculture is the changing American work force. He said the native born work force is more educated and is less likely to do manual labor. Mr. Olmstead reviewed how the e-verify system works and said some of the pros to the system are it is free, easy to use, mostly accurate and provides for appeals. He said some of the cons are it cannot be used as a preemployment screening tool, the employee remains in employment during the appeal process, it does not protect against identity theft, and it may create additional work for the employer.

Mr. Olmstead reviewed the number of guest worker programs in various states. He said there is no visa program for year round agriculture employees, there is only a seasonal visa. He explained the problems and benefits to the H-2A program. He said some benefits are, it provides an adequate work force, and it is a regulated, legal method for workers. He explained some of the problems are it has a daunting administrative process, the quotas are set too low, the certifications are often issued late and there is no system for non-seasonal labor.

Mr. Olmstead reviewed the immigration laws for the states of Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah. He explained that each state has something in common, their immigration reform laws are being challenged in the courts. Mr. Olmstead reviewed some of the challenges these states are facing in the courts and the costs to the states. He also reviewed the impacts of the immigration reform laws on agriculture in Georgia, saying over 50 percent of producers reported income losses in agriculture due to lack of workers.

In response to questions from the Committee, **Mr. Olmstead** said the sheep industry has set up a program specific to the sheep industry regarding H-2A employees. He said the quotas are set each year and the rest of agriculture and other industries are envious of the program. He said there are multiple bills in Congress regarding immigration reform and Idaho's delegation are aware of the laws being proposed. In response to more questions from the Committee, Mr. Olmstead gave a summary of where Idaho stands on this issue, saying over the past five years there have been several bills introduced in Idaho similar to Arizona's legislation, but presently there is an executive order to verify employees in Idaho.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the Committee the meeting adjourned at 2:16 p.m.

Representative Andrus
Chairman

Susan Werlinger
Secretary