



Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

314 First Ave. West — Seattle, WA, 98119 — (206) 281-8901 — Fax (206) 285-5805
906 S. Columbia Ave., #330 — Olympia, WA, 98501 — (360) 943-0608

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Kathy Cummings, WSLC — 206-281-8901 x28 or cell 206-604-3698
Erik Nicholson, United Farm Workers — 253-274-0416
Jeff Johnson, WSLC — 206-281-8901

The WSLC, United Farm Workers Blast Effort to Pass State Guestworker Program

The Washington State Labor Council and the United Farm Workers union today blasted efforts of the Washington Farm Bureau to draft legislation aimed at creating a state guestworker program.

"This is one of the worst drafted ideas I've seen in twenty years of working with farmworkers," said Erik Nicholson, International Director of the United Farm Workers. "This concept not only runs afoul of federal immigration law, but is partisan politics at its worst," Nicholson added.

The concept, if approved by the WA Farm Bureau, would create a state run guestworker program to supply foreign workers to Washington employers.

"We don't need the State getting involved in federal immigration law," said Rick Bender, President of the WSLC. "We need real immigration reform now. The WA Farm Bureau should be supporting efforts by the American Farm Bureau and other State Farm Bureaus to pass legislation in Congress."

The United Farm Workers has been working on federal immigration reform in conjunction with employer organizations such as the American Farm Bureau, National Coalition of Agricultural Employers, and the American Nursery and Landscape Association for the last ten years.

"Instead of working together as many of us have done in agriculture, the WA Farm Bureau has decided to again engage in partisan politics by proposing the poorly conceived guestworker program. If ever there was a time for everyone to work together on immigration reform, it's now," said Nicholson.

Organized labor strongly opposes this idea of a guestworker program. Earlier this month, at the WSLC convention, delegates overwhelmingly passed a resolution condemning state guestworker programs such as this.

"We will do everything in our power to ensure that this program never gets passed by the State legislature," said Bender.

For more information, SEE THE ATTACHED copy of the WSLC resolution, visit www.wslc.org or call the WSLC Communications Director Kathy Cummings at (206) 281-8901.

REGARDING AGRICULTURAL GUEST WORKERS

Resolution #9

WHEREAS, the federal agricultural guest worker program, known as the H-2A program, has existed in one form or another for the past 40 years and;

WHEREAS, growers can only apply to bring workers in under this program after receiving certification from U.S. Department of Labor that there is an insufficient number of domestic workers available to meet their needs and:

WHEREAS, the federal and state oversight of this program has been woefully inadequate, resulting in widespread abuses, including debt peonage, human trafficking, slavery, withholding of workers' passports, underpayment of wages, substandard housing, and;

WHEREAS, union representation is the best vehicle for all workers, regardless of visa status, to ensure there is respect and dignity in their worksite and;

WHEREAS, Congress' lack of action to pass immigration reform legalizing the majority of the U.S.'s agricultural workforce, combined with tougher enforcement actions has resulted in explosive growth of the H-2A program and;

WHEREAS, the United Farm Workers, for the past two years, has worked in Mexico, Thailand, the U.S. and other countries to create a just, union guest worker program for use in those situations where there is a legitimate shortage of domestic farm workers and;

WHEREAS, workers employed through this union program do not pay recruitment fees and enjoy the full protection of a union contract and;

WHEREAS, growers and their organizations, including the Washington Farm Bureau, instead of working with the UFW to build the union guest worker program, are instead contemplating running legislation to create a "state" guest worker program that would further diminish workers' rights; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, oppose effort to create a state H-2A program in Washington; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, call on the Governor and State legislature to work support the UFW's union guest worker initiative by actively promoting it with Washington growers; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, shall support efforts of the UFW to ensure that all agricultural workers in Washington enjoy union representation, regardless of their visa.