

Altmire Criticizes U.S. Department of Labor Proposal that Allows Illegal Immigrants to Set Wage Rate

(Washington, DC) — U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today announced that he has sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Assistant Secretary Leon Sequeira criticizing a proposal that could drag down American workers' wages and create a disincentive for employers to hire Americans.

(Washington, DC) — U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today announced that he has sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Assistant Secretary Leon Sequeira criticizing a proposal that could drag down American workers' wages and create a disincentive for employers to hire Americans. The DOL proposal in question could lower Americans' wages by allowing illegal immigrants, earning below-market wages, to set the market rate for nearly all wages in the agricultural industry. This letter was sent following Sequeira's testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee on May 6, during which he failed to sufficiently answer questions Congressman Altmire asked about this new proposal.

“When Mr. Sequeira testified before the House Education and Labor Committee last week, I questioned him about the Department of Labor's plan to include the wages paid to illegal immigrants when calculating the wage rates for nearly all of America's agricultural workers,” Altmire said. “I find it outrageous that the Department of Labor is adopting a policy that could lower hard working Americans' wages and create a disincentive for employers to hire Americans for agricultural jobs. This is yet another example of how this Administration fails to crack down on employers who break the law by hiring illegal immigrants and instead offers proposals that hurt American workers.”

Under these proposals, DOL would begin using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational and Employment Statistics Survey to evaluate wages paid to H-2A agricultural guest workers, foreign workers who come to the U.S. to perform short-term agriculture jobs. Since this wage survey does not account for workers' immigration status, it includes undocumented workers' wages when calculating the average wages for all H-2A agricultural workers. This artificially lowers the wages that H-2A employers are required to pay their employees, which makes hiring foreign workers more attractive and can lower the wages that employers are willing to pay their American employees.

“Last week's hearing raised a number of serious concerns about the Department of Labor's proposals to weaken labor protections in the agricultural guest worker program,” said Congressman George Miller, Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. “If these proposals are enacted, wages for both U.S. workers and guest workers would be driven down further. I'd like to commend Congressman Altmire's leadership in ensuring that American workers will not be harmed by the Department's misguided proposals.”