

Statement Regarding Recent Immigration Enforcement

The June 5th immigration enforcement at Corso's Flower and Garden Center in Ohio serves as a stark and sad reminder that America's family farms and small businesses urgently need Congress and the White House to act now to fix our immigration system.

It is ironic that this latest enforcement action coincided with a US Department of Labor announcement that there are about 400,000 more job openings than there are job seekers to fill them. Our elected leaders are making a grave mistake if they think our nation can simply enforce its way out of our "immigration problem." All of us will pay the price if they try.

Foreign-born workers have long been essential to the economy in industries like agriculture and horticulture. And yet, the legal visa programs available to employers have fallen far short of their potential due to bureaucracy, expense, unreliability, and – in the case of H-2B – an unrealistic, non-market-based statutory cap. Industries like horticulture are largely shut out of the limited employment-based immigration options that do exist.

Again, ironically, the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Labor were recently authorized by Congress to approve 69,320 additional H-2B visas. They stopped well short of that and made only 15,000 available, roughly one-quarter of the actual need.

So in the face of Congressional inaction, another raid occurs. Another business is crippled. Hard working people that are contributing to the economy of their community are deported. Their American coworkers may find their own livelihoods at risk, as the aftermath of a raid often jeopardizes the very survival of a farm or business. Employees and families are separated, lives and livelihoods are damaged or destroyed. Businesses find themselves between a rock and a hard place as the legal options are few, and to date have failed us.

We can and must do better. Congress has, for decades, sidestepped the urgent need to fix a broken system. It's time that our enforcement resources are targeted toward true threats, and that well-functioning immigration and work visa programs allow our industry to achieve its economic potential.

We are a nation of laws. Those laws must change over time to best reflect the strong values of America, like hard work and strong families, and needs of our growing economy. When our laws or their enforcement conflict with our core values, then it's time to look at those laws. After thirty years of avoiding the issue, it's time for Congress and this administration to roll up their sleeves, and work on a bipartisan basis to fix our immigration laws and visa programs.

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