

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to you today regarding the Department of State's decision to suspend routine nonimmigrant visa processing, effective March 18, 2020. We are deeply concerned that the suspension of visa processing, including H-2A visas for temporary or seasonal agricultural workers, will have a disastrous effect on U.S. agriculture, further endangering our nation's food supply in this time of national crisis. As such, we urge you to immediately issue public guidance confirming that State will (1) continue processing visas for returning H-2A workers who are eligible for waivers of the in-person visa interview; (2) extend the availability of such waivers for returning H-2A workers who have been interviewed in the previous 2 to 3 years; and (3) allow new H-2A workers who are ineligible for waivers to request a visa interview under the emergency travel exception only during the duration of this crisis.

A complete suspension on visa processing for H-2A workers will have a devastating impact on the national food supply and a disproportionate effect on the national agriculture economy. In 2017, agriculture, food, and related industries contributed \$1.053 trillion to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), a 5.4 percent share. In 2018, 22 million full- and part-time jobs were related to the agricultural and food sectors – 11 percent of total U.S. employment. These individuals not only contribute to the national economy but also guarantee our nation's food security.

As local and national leaders work together to mitigate the adverse impacts of the novel coronavirus, they will rely on farmers across the country to continue providing safe, healthy, and abundant food. Suspending routine nonimmigrant visa processing poses a serious and significant barrier to ensuring our nation's food security in these trying times.

On March 16, 2020, the White House released "The President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America," stating "[i]f you work in a critical infrastructure industry ... such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical *and food supply*, you have a special responsibility to maintain your

normal work schedule.”¹ For many of America’s farms, it is simply impossible to maintain a normal work schedule without H-2A workers.

We urge the Department of State to act quickly and decisively to ensure that the U.S. agricultural sector can continue to provide a safe and robust domestic food supply during this national emergency by providing clarifying guidance regarding visa processing for H-2A workers.

Due to the gravity of this issue, I ask that you respond to this letter no later than close of business, March 26, 2020.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



TJ Cox
Member of Congress



Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress



Mike Simpson
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress

¹ White House, *The President’s Coronavirus Guidelines for America*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf (emphasis added).



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



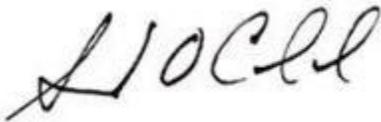
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



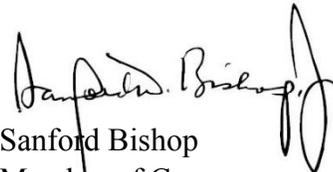
John Yarmuth
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