

## **Ron Johnson introduces bill to create state-run guest worker program**

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States could run their own guest-worker visa programs under a bill introduced Wednesday by Republican U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson.

The proposal has backing from groups representing the dairy and tech industries, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Americans for Tax Reform and the libertarian Cato Institute.

Johnson previewed the legislation during a Cato Institute forum.

The bill, also introduced in the House by Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colorado, would create a non-immigrant visa for non-U.S. citizens to come to a state to "perform services, provide investment, direct an enterprise, or otherwise contribute to the economic development agenda of the State," according to a bill summary provided by Johnson's office.

Visas could be granted for a period of up to three years, and could be renewed at the end of the term.

"We have a shortage of workers in all different areas of the economy. We need to recognize that a one-size-fits-all federal model for visas or guest workers doesn't work," Johnson said in remarks about the bill this week. "Let the states manage the visas, allocate them to the industries that need the workers, set prevailing wage rates. I think states would do a better job of protecting their state workers — American workers — as well as making sure their industries have the people they need to be able to grow."

To set up a program, a state would need approval from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and from its Legislature. States could also enter into agreements to jointly administer a guest worker program.

Workers could move from one job to another, but would be required to remain in the state of sponsorship unless that state had a reciprocity agreement with other states. States would be required to notify the Department of Homeland Security of a worker's address and employment.

In the first year of the program, a state could issue 5,000 guest worker visas. Additional visas would be available from a pool of 250,000, allocated based on the state's population as a percentage of the U.S. population.

Participants in the program would be able to apply for permanent residency without jeopardizing their status as state-based non-immigrants.

Brian Dake, legislative director for the Wisconsin Independent Businesses Agri-Business Coalition, said in a letter to Johnson that the legislation would be a "meaningful reform of our nation's immigration laws and a beneficial one for Wisconsin dairy farmers."

The federal H-2A program offers temporary visas for seasonal agricultural work, Dake said, but doesn't address the need for workers year-round.

Other groups backing the proposal include the Outdoor Amusement Business Association, the National Roofing Contractors Association and [FWD.us](#), an immigration reform group launched by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

A spokesman for Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Johnson's Democratic counterpart in the Senate, declined comment on the bill.