



## **GOP Sen. Mike Crapo Steps Back from the House's Farm Amnesty Bill**

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Idaho GOP Sen. Mike Crapo is stepping back from his initial show of support for the Democrats' farmworker amnesty bill, which threatens America's rural communities by giving employers a low-wage, no-rights foreign labor force for a wide variety of agriculture jobs.

"Even though Senator Crapo has said he'll work on a Senate version of the bill, we should add he won't support the existing House-passed version," Lindsay Northern, Crapo's communications director, told Breitbart News. She continued:

Senator Crapo supports helping Idaho farm producers with problems they have under the existing system, such as concerns over liability and the fact dairy producers need a year-round, stable workforce. In all, 34 Idaho industries support improving the workforce system. Crapo continues to work with those business leaders on potential solutions.

The Democrat bill would provide amnesty to at least 1 million farmworkers — plus their families. In exchange, the bill would give agriculture employers the legal ability to replace their amnestied farmworkers by hiring an unlimited inflow of very low-wage H-2A visa workers for a wider variety of jobs. The political swap allows pro-amnesty Democrats to direct the agriculture industry's lobbying clout against equivocating Republican senators.

Crapo's step back "is really a welcome development," said Rob Law, the director of regulatory affairs and policy at the Center for Immigration Studies. "It is a true recognition that now is not the time for amnesty of any sorts, that there's a crisis at the border, and there are American communities, including in Idaho, that still have not fully recovered from COVID-19. ... The Senator recognized that, and he should be applauded," said Law.

Few Republicans push back against cheap-labor amnesties by describing the economic damage to working Americans — even though the amnesty advocates recognize deep public concern about the economic impact. Instead, GOP legislators cite proxy concerns, such as border chaos or the unfairness of amnesties for law-breaking migrants.

For example, the GOP-run Idaho Senate recently shot down a business-backed plan to provide driver's licenses to illegals, partly by spotlighting statements from law-enforcement officials. The bill was backed by multiple trade groups, including the Idaho Dairymen's Association, the Associated General Contractors, the Boise Metro Chamber, and the Food Producers of Idaho.

The Democrats' push for amnesty is a problem for the bill, Northern suggested:

Senator Crapo has said in the past that he won't support amnesty nor giving advantage or benefit toward citizenship for anyone who crosses the border illegally. Those entering must get in the end of the line and following the legal process by applying for a green card, permanent status, or citizenship.

President Joe Biden's border crush is also a problem, Northern said. "The present situation at the southern border has not helped the situation, but negotiations will continue in the Senate," she said, adding, "Again, Crapo cannot support the House bill as presently written."

Many GOP Senators are dodging media questions — and lobbyists' phone calls — as the public rejects the Democrats' effort to accelerate the inflow of foreign workers into the decent jobs needed by at least 17 million unemployed Americans.

Crapo's March 23 statement to Breitbart News came after a March 19 announcement from Crapo's office.

"House passage of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act is an important step toward bringing certainty to our country's agriculture industry and the hard-working producers and farmworkers," said the statement from Crapo and Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO). Bennet was an original sponsor of the 2013 "Gang of Eight" amnesty that cost the Democrats five Senate seats in 2014. Three of the four GOP co-sponsors are no longer in the Senate.

The statement continued: "We will work together to introduce companion legislation in the U.S. Senate that appropriately addresses the needs of both the industry and the farmworkers that uphold it."

However, the House deal is also a threat to the economic future of many rural towns.

The bill would allow employers to sideline many of the 1 million Americans who make their living in a wide variety of agriculture jobs, including the Americans who operate harvesting and food processing machines.

The bill cuts wages for the H-2A workers and also allows farm companies to pay their H-2A foreign workers with government-provided bonuses of 40,000 family-packs of American green cards each year. The result is that much of the payroll that would be paid to American farmworkers would now be diverted into remittances for foreign people in foreign countries, in turn starving rural American towns of consumers, retail sales, housing values, and tax receipts.

This process is already far advanced, and farms may import almost 300,000 H-2A workers this year, up from 100,000 in 2014.

The H-2A workers can be hired and fired at will, with most working just six months before being sent home. The reliability and flexibility of the H-2A workers minimize the need for farms to invest in new technology such as apple-picking robots or robots that can hoe fields in place of stoop labor.

Many skilled jobs are being transferred to H-2A workers. The *Duluth News Tribune* reported February 8:

Chad Olsen, owner of Olsen Custom Farms, based in Hendricks, Minn., tends to hire about 65 workers through the H-2A program from South Africa to run his custom combine crews

throughout the middle of the U.S. The visa program supplies hundreds of temporary ag-related employees in the Dakotas, Minnesota and elsewhere.

In 2020, the company was unable to import all the South African workers that it wanted, so it hired American workers. Olsen said:

A lot of local friends, my family, some of my employees' families, kind of stepped up to the plate and drove combine for the month of June while we were in Oklahoma. When the employees started arriving last year, the company had local people who had committed to helping out.

In early 2021, the coronavirus crisis threatened to block the arrival of skilled South African workers, Agri-Pulse.com reported January 27:

Jennifer James, who runs an Arkansas rice, soybean and corn operation, has a contract for three South African workers to start March 1 and is concerned that they may not arrive in time for planting season, which starts in late March.

... South African workers are especially valuable because of their experience in farming and with GPS equipment, she said.

“There’s a few farmers around here that, unfortunately, their entire crew except for family comes from South Africa, so you know that (travel ban) is gonna be very devastating to their operations,” she said.

But the growing use of visa workers changes the economies of towns that are home to many American food workers.

ABC News described the economics of meatpacking towns in Iowa, where employers have discarded Americans and hired endless waves of legal refugees, illegal migrants, and temporary visa workers:

Marshalltown’s transformation wasn’t without tension.

In a paper published by the State Historical Society of Iowa about Storm Lake, a similar Iowa town whose economy also relies heavily on meat-packing, Dr. Mark Grey of Northern Iowa University wrote that in the ‘70s and ‘80s, “so-called new breed [corporate] meatpackers — drove down wages and benefits, increased productivity, neutralized unions, experienced high employee turn-over, and relied increasingly on immigrant and refugee labor.”

Meat-packing plants that used to employ experienced butchers hired unskilled workers, and often preferred workers without a union background, according to Dr. Grey’s paper, which outlines that towns like Marshalltown subsequently lost many of their middle-class jobs.

In Congress, Democrats frankly admitted the corporate giveaway they are dangling to get pro-amnesty corporate lobbying pressure on Republicans.

“The bill implements a wage freeze for the year 2020 [for 250,000 H-2A visa workers],” Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) said in November 2019 after the bill was drafted. She described the corporatist swap, saying:

This is a very important matter for employers, [and] wages are expected to increase by another seven to eight percent next year. Under this bill, those wage increases won't happen.

These are significant wage reforms — a recent report by the CATO Institute found that the bill, if enacted, would have saved farmers \$324 million in labor expenses in 2019 alone.

“I would prefer that these wage concessions were not in the bill,” Lofgren said. “It is a compromise that allows additional [migrant] people to come in to meet the growing [worker] needs of our agriculture sector.”

In contrast, several Republicans say they support the bill to help employers, not American employees.

For years, a wide variety of pollsters have shown deep and broad American opposition to legal migration, labor migration, and the inflow of temporary contract workers into jobs sought by young U.S. graduates.

The multiracial, cross-sex, non-racist, class-based, intra-Democrat, and solidarity-themed opposition to labor migration coexists with generally favorable personal feelings toward legal immigrants and toward immigration in theory — despite the media magnification of many skewed polls and articles still pushing the 1950s corporate “Nation of Immigrants” claim.

The deep public opposition is built on the widespread recognition that migration moves money from employees to employers, from families to investors, from young to old, from children to their parents, from homebuyers to real estate investors, and from the central states to the coastal states.

Under Biden, the nation's immigration system has gotten worse, according to 56 percent of registered voters in rural districts, according to a March 19-22 poll of 1,994 registered voters by Morning Consult and Politico. Only 13 percent of the rural respondents said the immigration system had gotten better under Biden.

Forty-four percent of independents say the immigration system has gotten worse under Biden, while 12 percent said it has gotten better, according to the poll.

“There will continue to be discussions,” Crapo's spokeswoman told Breitbart News. “There are needs within the agriculture community which we are of course sensitive to. But we are holding to core values, and I'm sure that's true in much of the GOP conference, although I can only speak for this office,” said Northern.