

Immigration, H-2B dominate Day on the Hill discussions

BY MARISA PALMIERI

When members of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and affiliated organizations visited Washington D.C. on July 23 for the annual Legislative Day on the Hill event, there were four main issues planned for discussion with lawmakers. However, one of those four—immigration reform and the H-2B seasonal guest-worker visa program—was the hottest topic.

PLANET advocates the passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill that preserves the H-2B program and includes a fair approach to setting H-2B wages. Even before an immigration bill is passed, PLANET's pressing for relief

from Department of Labor regulations that make the H-2B program more expensive and complicated to use.

S. 744, the immigration bill passed by the Senate earlier this year is a good sign, said Laurie Flanagan, executive vice president at DCLRS, a lobbying firm for PLANET, during a legislative briefing on July 22. This bill includes many positive tenets, she said, including the creation of a year-round temporary "W" visa program, the reinstatement of the H-2B returning-worker exemption and favorable wage methodology. Still, Flanagan has some concerns with this bill, such as the returning-working exemption expiring after five years.

Flanagan also isn't convinced the House will address immigration in a

comprehensive manner—piecemeal provisions are more likely, she said. The House did not take up immigration before the August recess.

Legislative Day on the Hill's timing was good, however, because it came just a week after Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) introduced a favorable H-2B bill (H.R. 2765), addressing wage rules. Participants used it as an opportunity to ask their lawmakers to co-sponsor the legislation. Flanagan described the bill as a standalone measure with the same wage language from S. 744.

The other three issues highlighted during Legislative Day include seeking relief from overregulation, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits and establishment of a tick-bourne disease advisory council.

The turnout for Legislative Day was a 60 percent increase over last year, with 193 people meeting with their legislators or staff. PLANET members and members of partner organizations met with legislative office staff from 25 states. Partnering on this year's event were the Tree Care Industry Association, Snow & Ice Management Association and Accredited Snow Contractors Association.

Members of the New Jersey Legislative Day on the Hill contingent: George Futterknecht, Wood Landscapes; Ray Cole, Elite Landscaping; Joe Ehrenreich, Youngs Landscape Management; Dominick Mondì, NJNLA; Jody Shilan, NJLCA; Chris Marino, Xtreme Snow Pros; Thomas Nastasi, Mills Insurance; and Matthew Peterson, Mills Insurance. Cole, vice president of NJNLA, met with offices of seven different congressmen and one senator. He said: "There is a lot they can do to help our industry, which is so important to New Jersey. I was impressed at how interested each office seemed in our issues."



On the road



Garden Staters Bob Dobson (left) and Glenn Jacobsen pose for a photo in Washington D.C. in July. When Jacobsen took the helm of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) board of directors May 1, he joined Dobson as a fellow New Jerseyan serving as president of a national Green Industry association. Dobson is president of Middletown Sprinkler Co. in Port Monmouth, N.J., and current Irrigation Association president. Jacobsen is president of Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction, based in Midland Park, N.J. The two have even crossed paths on a landscape project in the past, Dobson says.



Field trip PLANET member Joy Diaz of Land Care Inc. in Nevada and her son Joshua visited Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev) on July 23.



Volunteer time More than 400 volunteers from the Green Industry visited Washington D.C. on July 22 to donate time, materials and the use of their equipment to spruce up Arlington National Cemetery during PLANET's 17th annual Renewal & Remembrance event. Here, Eric Wenger, owner of Complete Lawn Care, Laytonsville, Md., and Caterpillar's National Trade Association Manager Jason Becker load a spreader with lime.

PHOTOS: BOB DOBSON (LEFT), PLANET (TOP RIGHT); LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (BOTTOM RIGHT)



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