

Immigration bill on the table

The Senate bill could have a major Green Industry impact.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

The “Gang of Eight” bipartisan group of senators and representatives introduced an immigration bill to the Senate on April 17. The legislation includes many provisions that could affect the Green Industry.

It’s “the most encouragement we’ve had in a long time” on immigration, Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), told *Landscape Management*.

Delaney highlighted a few key provisions pertinent to the landscape industry.

H-2B guest-worker program. The new bill would reinstate the returning-worker exemption through 2018. It also includes language that’s similar to the controversial 2008 wage methodology. However, the

bill would require employers to pay workers’ incoming and outgoing transportation costs and reasonable subsistence costs during the travel period. Plus, employers must certify and attest the H-2B workers didn’t and will not displace U.S. workers employed within 90 days before the start and end dates of an H-2B worker.

W visa program. This new program for low-skill workers allows spouses and minor children of the workers under the program to accompany workers to the U.S. and be given work authorization for the same period as the W visa holder. Some members of the landscape industry may qualify for this program, which isn’t seasonal and temporary in nature like the H-2B program.

E-Verify. The legislation requires all employers to use the federal government’s online system for verifying workers are legally permitted to work in the U.S. This mandate would be phased in over a five-year period. As part of the system, every

noncitizen would be required to show a “biometric work authorization card” or a “biometric green card.”

Unlawful status. The proposed legislation allows for people currently in the country illegally to apply to adjust their status to the legal status of Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI). Those eligible to do so include people who have resided in the U.S. prior to Dec. 31, 2011, and have maintenance of continuous physical presence since then and have paid fees. After 10 years, aliens in RPI status may adjust to Lawful Permanent Resident status through the same merit-based system everyone else must use to earn a green card. Many people are ineligible, including convicted felons and other criminals.

“It’s a good start and it has a lot of good provisions in there,” Delaney said. “But I can guarantee you this isn’t the bill that’s going to be voted on. There will be changes made to get it more acceptable to more people.”



MORE confidence.

Use it on any cool-season turf, any time during the season, and control virtually any broadleaf weed. And do it all without any surprises. That’s how Escalade² herbicide gives you more confidence where it matters most.

ESCALADE²

More where it matters most.
www.nufarm.com/usto

©2013 Nufarm. Important: Always read and follow label instructions. Escalade² is trademark of Nufarm.



Half a century of success

Michael Bellantoni may be stepping away from his business, but he's not slowing down.

BY DAN JACOBS

After 50 years of running his landscaping business, Michael Bellantoni, LIC, might be on the back nine. Or he might be in Hawaii or Florida or Aruba. But even as he winds down his role in the business, rest assured, he will not sit back and simply watch the grass grow.

"The worst thing for me to do is just stop because I'm so active with my lifestyle," says Bellantoni, who still retains the title of president and CEO of Michael Bellantoni Inc., the full-service, White Plains, N.Y.-based landscaping company he launched in 1963.

BELLANTONI'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

"These are the [principles] that we preach in our company to everybody—from the guy pushing the mower to the guy selling jobs, interacting with clients," says Michael Bellantoni, president and CEO of Michael Bellantoni Inc.:

1. Put safety first.
2. Make no excuses.
3. Be prepared.
4. Be honest.
5. Have a positive attitude.
6. Don't make promises you can't keep.
7. Look professional and be professional.
8. Be a leader.
9. Provide best value of service.

"That's the advice I'd give to other people in business," he adds.



While he has found time for golf and the occasional vacation, Bellantoni admits he usually put the business first.

"I always found a reason to stay at work and not go do something I wanted to do," Bellantoni says. "But, I made a commitment to myself. I'm not going to let work keep me from doing the things I want to do anymore. They need to learn to pick up the slack.... Otherwise, I'll be here forever."

The "they" Bellantoni refers to are his two sons and the management team he leaves behind. Statistics suggest about two-thirds of businesses handed to the second generation don't survive, but Bellantoni isn't worried about the future of his company. Two of his four children have been helping him run the organization for the past several years. His son Matthew Bellantoni is in charge of business development, and his son Michael Bellantoni, LIC, is operations manager.

In many businesses, "the second generation just doesn't have what the first generation had," Bellantoni says. "I preach this to my sons all the time. I have the strongest confidence in watching them operate and make decisions that they're not going to be part of that (failing) percentage."

Bellantoni retains majority ownership in the business. Over the next

Michael Bellantoni (center) is flanked by his two sons who work with him in the business: Matthew (left), who handles business development, and Michael Jr., who manages operations.

couple of years he will transition ownership to his sons.

"I enjoy going out to see clients, old and new," he says. "I enjoy designing. I enjoy engineering projects. As for everyday operations, I am going to get to a point this season where I really don't have to come in in the morning if I don't want to."

One thing he does want to continue is his work with the larger Green Industry. He's been a member of the New York State Turf & Landscape Association for 30 years, helped bring certification to the landscaping industry and has traveled around the country helping other states get their testing in line.

Bellantoni also has worked with national industry organizations such as the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), where he mentors others in the industry as a Trailblazer.

"The secret to success is good relationships," Bellantoni says. "That's with your people in the company as well."

Bellantoni's done it for 50 years. He should know.

Jacobs is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

First the neighbors will be jealous. Then they'll give you a call.

Our best-in-class products combined with the WinField Insights™ Tech Kit and WinField™ Academy classes can help you look deeper and plan smarter.



VISIT WINFIELD.COM/LAWNINSIGHTS ON YOUR
MOBILE BROWSER, THEN PLACE YOUR PHONE HERE



WINFIELD™

WinField is a trademark of Winfield Solutions, LLC. ©2013 Winfield Solutions, LLC.

Jumping at the opportunity

Volunteer efforts are ingrained in ALCC's culture. BY CASEY PAYTON

In its 50 years, the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) has established a long history of supporting communities, sponsoring and leading projects throughout the state.

"Giving back to the community is one of the things we were founded on," says Kristen Fefes, executive director of the ALCC. "Part of that is because making communities beautiful, productive and sustainable is something

that our membership does every day."

Those community projects have included numerous undertakings over the years. In 2012, ALCC efforts included the installation of an edible garden at Excelsior Youth Center, a school for at-risk teenage girls. Fefes says many of the projects stand out in her mind, but this one had a powerful impact.

"To hear these young women talk about rape, drug abuse and the lack of support from their families was heart wrenching," she recalls. "One of the things that's important to community service is ensuring you have the right volunteers for the right project. On this particular project they were mostly female volunteers that wanted to be role models for these young girls. That was inspiring."

There were other efforts, as well. At Poudre Valley Hospital, the Northern Chapter of the ALCC took on a project in which 14 volunteers transformed a parking lot into a healing garden to benefit both patients and staff. It involved



In 2012, The Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado installed healing and edible gardens for those in need.

food bank a few years back. "It was such awful weather that day and people could have felt discouraged or even wanted to give up, but instead everyone said, 'It's all right, we're doing this,' and then went ahead," Fefes recalls. "Everyone ended up having a blast and it was very memorable."

As the ALCC chapters continue to embrace community involvement, Fefes says she feels it's now "in their blood" and something they will continue to do.

"Helping people in need is just the right thing to do," Fefes adds. "I've found our chapters are jumping at the opportunity to do that and to make a difference in our communities. We all benefit from our surrounding communities becoming more beautiful.

Fefes says that by this point, community involvement is ingrained in the ALCC and that its members consider volunteering to be part of their membership.

"I see the interest in volunteering as something that's an ongoing part of our future," she says. **LM**

installing irrigation and hundreds of shrubs and grasses. The Southern Chapter took 34 volunteers and transformed a field of weeds at a behavioral health services center into a community gathering place for the disabled, seniors, high-risk youth and veterans.

Chapters select projects in different ways, Fefes says. "Sometimes it's a really organic process where there's an obvious need that comes out of the community and the chapter responds to it," she says. "Other times there's a more formal nomination and selection process based on ideas."

Then it's a matter of getting a group of volunteers together, which Fefes says is often easy to do. "We've had a couple of volunteers bring their own children to a project," she says. "I think it's a great way to inspire our youth to give back and show them the value of community service."

Another project that stands out for Fefes is one at a

AT A GLANCE

State association: Association Landscape Contractors of Colorado

Location: Denver

Executive director: Kristen Fefes

SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Excelsior Youth Center**— In 2012, 24 volunteers from the Denver Chapter designed and installed an edibles garden within a larger master-planned garden at this school for at-risk teen girls.

▶ **Poudre Valley Hospital**— Last year, members from the Northern Chapter transformed a parking lot into a healing garden that included irrigation and hundreds of plants.

▶ **Aspen Pointe Enterprises**— Thirty-four Southern Chapter members turned a weed field into a community gathering place, with support from 18 suppliers.

Landscape Management is the media sponsor of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Community Stewardship Award. We'll feature each of the program's winners January through June. For more information or to read about the other winners, visit landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward or landscapemanagement.net/givingback.

POLARIS BRUTUS

Machines shown with optional accessories. See dealer for details.

WORK WILL NEVER BE THE SAME. INTRODUCING THE FUTURE OF PTO-EQUIPPED SIDE x SIDES.

When the job requires everything you have, it's nice to know that you have everything. Polaris® BRUTUS™ features full, out-front PTO capabilities. The innovative system delivers power directly from the vehicle's engine to drive a complete line of purpose-built front-end attachments. So you can sweep, mow, blow, lift, plow and scoop, all with one task-tackling vehicle. Add to that a hard-working diesel engine, hydrostatic transmission and a smooth ride we've spent 60 years perfecting, and you get more versatility, more capability and more comfort. But most importantly, you get more done.



SCOOP



BLOW



SWEEP

Warning: The Polaris BRUTUS is not intended for on-highway use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers must be at least 12 years old and tall enough to sit with feet firmly on the floor. All SxS drivers should take a safety training course. Contact ROHVA at www.rohva.org or (949) 255-2560 for additional information regarding safety training. Polaris recommends that drivers and passengers wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing, especially for trail riding and other recreational use. Always wear seat belts. Be particularly careful on difficult terrain. Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2013 Polaris Industries Inc.

Start changing the way you think about work.
POLARIS.COM/BRUTUS



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

Knowledge: your secret weapon

If you're like me, you get your fair share of industry news blasts, social media updates and business-in-general updates. But how many of you actually read them?

The truth is, as much as we find the 24/7 news cycle overwhelming, deleting or dismissing updates just might be holding you back.

Early in my career, Joe Marsh, one of my mentors and the founder of Green Valley Landscaping (later acquired by ValleyCrest), met with me every morning to review the news.

Keeping up to date on the industry and staying informed was a priority for the company, and we clearly used it to our advantage. We discussed how announcements from our competitors, customers and suppliers would affect Green Valley's hiring, buying, operations and sales—and help us be more competitive. This practice taught me how to think critically, assess the big picture and learn how events happening somewhere else could influence something happening on my desk.

Landscape owners need to think about trends all the time. This year in particular there are legislative changes, spending cuts and government budget reforms that will significantly impact the workplace: health care mandates, immigration/tax laws and nationwide dialogues on green and environmental initiatives. Regardless of your position politically, you need to stay informed and know how these changes will affect your bottom line.

There are scores of websites, newspapers, magazines and other popular news sources to choose from. Information is abundant and everyone is swamped, with not enough time to absorb it all.

Here are 12 best practices to streamline the overload, prioritize what's relevant and make knowledge your secret weapon for success. They'll also help you keep up with trends in 30 minutes a day or less.

1. Keep up with industry news and insights through our own Green Industry media, who've triaged the important issues so we don't have to.

2. Follow state and national association newsletters and weekly feeds; scan headlines and talking points for facts and figures.

3. Identify and keep an eye on favorite news websites and seek a cross section of opinions.

4. Use an online news aggregator (i.e. Google News), to search current and past stories from a multitude of sources.

5. Create customized news pages or use an RSS feed, which provides an updated summary of web content and makes it easier to access specific topics.

6. Set up Google Alerts to stay on top of things without getting sidetracked by too much unrelated content.

7. Read all you can about our industry and your market. Keep up with trade publications and websites, influential bloggers and thought leaders.

8. Go beyond our own industry and learn what customers and professionals in related upstream fields (architecture, urban planning, development, real estate and construction) are talking and thinking about.

9. Read up on your customers' industries and their positions on issues through association journals, newsletters and blogs. Regularly talk with them about trends in their businesses. Read what your customers are saying on their social media sites and follow their news. What markets are they targeting? Are they expanding, downsizing? Are there new services? Is there an acquisition?

10. It pays to have a business-savvy mind. Read top business journals and magazines to find inspiration and information on marketing, management, technology, leadership and changing consumer preferences or buying habits.

11. Access or download mobile versions or apps of your favorite business and Green Industry news to your smartphones and tablets.

12. Encourage critical thinking and continuous learning. Set aside 30 minutes in your team meetings to focus on, share and discuss key topics and news that will affect your business.

May we suggest?

Subscribe to the LMDirect! weekly newsletter at landscapemanagement.net/subscribe/ or download our iPad app at itunes.com/apps/LandscapeManagementHD.

Perfection is perfectly simple.



TRIMEC[®]

BROADLEAF HERBICIDE

RELIABLE
DEPENDABLE
PREDICTABLE

Trusted for over 40 years | Original low-odor herbicide



800.821.7925 • pbigordon.com/trimec

Gordon's[®] and Trimec[®] are registered trademarks of PBI-Gordon Corp. 12/12 02275



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

Revenue growth: Closing more sales

In my March column I shared financial benchmark data for sales growth as well as a list of best-in-class tactics that drove that sales growth. Here I address one of those tactics—sales management and the use of a customer resource management (CRM) system. Most high-performance sales companies employ a CRM planning and tracking system such as BOSS LM or SalesForce.com to make plans, monitor plans and coach for success.

Make a plan

Table 1, below, shows how to set up a plan for a commercial landscape salesman in the columns “Plan number of leads,” “Plan dollars bid” and “Plan dollars closed.” In this real-life example the goal is to close \$1 million in new annualized contracts. The bid plan is based on a 20 percent close rate. Therefore, \$5 million needs to be bid. The required leads (a lead is an actual property) are based on an average monthly job size of \$2,500

(\$30,000 per year) and an 80 percent opportunity rate. To be successful, this salesman will need to find and develop 208 property leads. The monthly plan numbers are based on a pacing rate in line with your market’s seasonal buying history.

Monitor the plan

A planning and tracking system that captures actual lead, bid and close performance is an essential best practice. The “Actual” columns in Table 1 show this salesman is ahead on bids but lagging on sales closes. The sources for this report are three lists in the CRM system: 1). Leads that are in queue with scheduled activities for advancement to a bid; 2). Bids in the pipeline ready for decision and closing; and 3). Bids lost and closed. Many lost bids can be re-tasked for future year sales work.

Coach for success (i.e., closes)

The sales meeting is a best practice to help salesmen improve. A CRM has to be married to a process to refocus and coach salesmen toward success. Here’s a standard process.

Sales meeting agenda

1. Do the math. Is there enough in the pipeline 60 to 90 days out? Using the “Actual” columns in Table 1, we can project the closes from the bid pipeline. Presently \$1,056,000 is bid and \$270,000 is closed. This leaves \$786,000 available. Projecting the next 60 days of closes required (April and May) plus the current lag of \$30,000, \$230,000 is necessary to get back on track. Using the 20 percent close rate on the existing \$786,000 open bids would provide \$157,000. This is short of the goal.

2. Assign probabilities to open bids and strategize tactics to get a decision. Make phone calls during the meeting to open bids. It’s amazing how much progress you can make “doing it live.”

3. Assign priorities to leads/opportunities and strategize tactics to qualify and advance. Again, make phone calls and write emails during the meeting to get advancement.

TABLE 1: COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE SALES PLAN

Month	Plan number leads	Plan dollars bid	Actual dollars bid	Plan dollars closed	Actual dollars closed
January	21	\$500,000	\$455,000	\$50,000	\$47,000
February	21	\$250,000	\$277,000	\$100,000	\$94,000
March	21	\$250,000	\$324,000	\$150,000	\$129,000
April	21	\$500,000	-	\$100,000	-
May	21	\$750,000	-	\$100,000	-
June	21	\$500,000	-	\$100,000	-
July	21	\$500,000	-	\$50,000	-
August	21	\$500,000	-	\$50,000	-
September	10	\$250,000	-	\$50,000	-
October	10	\$250,000	-	\$100,000	-
November	10	\$250,000	-	\$100,000	-
December	10	\$500,000	-	\$50,000	-
Total	208	\$5 million	\$1,056,000	\$1 million	\$270,000
Progress to date			\$56,000		(\$30,000)

permagreen™

Using our 100+ years of lawn care experience and 15 years of R&D, we've invented great spreader sprayers that make you *MORE* money and give you more free time to enjoy it. That's why PermaGreen™ is the go-to industry standard.

PermaGreen's are the everyday choice of over ten thousand professionals who use them to profitably treat everything from postage stamps to multi-acre sports and commercial complexes. Agile, fast & powerful, it's a sound investment with a quick Return On Investment.

We'll prove its money-making power. Ride a PermaGreen™ Triumph on your lawns for 30 days: If you don't love it, we'll buy it back!* It's just that simple.



WIN A TRIUMPH!*

Enter online for your chance to make your dreams come true!

Triumph Options: Available with choice of standard 3-hole or optional 1-hole spreader mechanisms in a Spreader Sprayer, Spread-Only or Spray-Only version

permagreen.com | 800.346.2001

DREAM BIG. EXPECT MORE.

© 2012 PermaGreen™ Supreme, Inc. U.S. Patents 6,366,600 & 7,954,573. PermaGreen™ is a registered trademark of PermaGreen™ Supreme, Inc. All rights reserved. *See permagreen.com for details.

Get Smart

Closed-loop EFI brings high-tech brainpower and unmatched fuel efficiency to the mower engine.

Are your lawn mowers running *stoichiometrically*?

It's not a trick question. However, the answer might depend on whether or not your mowers are powered by closed-loop electronic-fuel-injection (EFI) engines. Stoichiometric combustion—a fancy way of saying “optimal fuel usage”—is one of the prime advantages of closed-loop EFI engines over open-loop EFI and carbureted engines. And while “stoichiometric” might sound like some kind of abstract Zen concept, achieving it produces tangible fuel savings and emissions reductions for landscape professionals.

AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY

With its origins in the automotive industry, closed-loop EFI engines incorporate an oxygen sensor in the muffler, which analyzes exhaust gases and sends data to an electronic control unit (ECU). If the data indicate the air-fuel mixture isn't ideal, the ECU adjusts the ratio of ingredients to maximize power while optimizing fuel usage. These systems close the loop, so to speak, between the air-fuel intake and the exhaust output, supplying a constant stream of critical operating information to the ECU.

“The ECU in a closed-loop EFI engine is collecting all of this information from the engine, plugging it into a series of mathematical equations and saying, ‘Perfect, this is what I need to input to provide optimal performance, power and efficiency,’” explains Brandon Fredricks, marketing channel manager for Kohler Engines.

What does this mean for the landscape professional? “Kohler's closed-loop Command PRO EFI engines use 25 percent less gasoline compared with similar-size carbureted engines. In real dollars, this translates to \$600 of fuel savings per engine in a year*.”

ADAPTING TO ALL OPERATING CONDITIONS

Kohler's closed-loop EFI system includes a manifold atmospheric-pressure (MAP) sensor that helps the engine adjust to fluctuations in weather conditions and altitude. The MAP sensor, along with other sensors in the system, are continuously providing feedback in pursuit of stoichiometric combustion—there's that word again—regardless of the operating conditions.



**Kohler's
Command
PRO EFI Engine**

“Our closed-loop EFI is unique because—unlike a carbureted or open-loop system—it's constantly adapting to the operating environment as well as changes within the engine,” Fredricks says. “So, in addition to making adjustments for humidity, temperature, altitude, and air quality—it's also adjusting based on the engine's oil temperature, cylinder temperature, air flow and more.”

A closed-loop EFI system is automatically recalibrating itself multiple times per second. This continuous loop of analysis, feedback, and adjustment also enables closed-loop engines to start up immediately—which is music to the ears of any operator who has gone through the rigmarole of choking and priming a carbureted engine on a cold morning.

“On our Command PRO EFI engines, the minute you turn the key the closed-loop system is already taking readings from all of the sensors to figure out the ideal air-fuel mixture,” says Fredricks.

LESS DOWNTIME

Kohler's closed-loop EFI system not only puts automotive-grade technology in the hands of operators, but also at the fingertips of the people who maintain the lawn mowers.

With Kohler's proprietary diagnostic software, maintenance personnel can simply connect to their laptop to perform a detailed troubleshooting analysis. The software not only identifies problems, but it also provides step-by-step instructions for quickly resolving the identified problem.

“We've really taken the guesswork out of engine service and repair,” Fredricks says. “Just like the automotive industry, our diagnostic software allows for quicker and better repairs, maximizing productivity and minimizing downtime.”

Many commercial OEMs have already integrated Kohler Command PRO EFI engines into their products. And the technology has been adopted by landscape pros nationwide who have responded favorably to the enhanced performance and fuel savings delivered by the line. For additional details, visit KohlerEngines.com.

**Compared to a comparable Kohler carbureted engine under comparable loads and duty cycles. Based on 600 hours of annual operation.*