



Legislative Report Summer 2103

For the last several months Communicating for America has been actively involved in the issue of immigration reform, working to ensure the viability of international agricultural exchange programs in this country and abroad. CA has held a number of meetings with key stakeholders, both at the federal and state level, to craft bi-partisan immigration reform legislation.

When the “Gang of Eight” Senators responsible for drafting the Senate legislation introduced their bill in April, CA moved to a new strategy and began to directly involve CA members who are also CA Exchange Program (CAEP) hosts in its advocacy efforts. The original legislation as passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee had some detrimental language and provisions regarding the J-1 Visa program that could have threatened the ability of programs such as CAEP to continue.

During a series of meetings in Wisconsin this spring with U.S. Senator Ron Johnson, CA testified with the help of two CA member/ CAEP hosts, stating the positive impact of exchange programs like CAEP, not only for the trainees and interns, but also the hosts, farms, and businesses that utilize these programs. Reynolds Livestock of Dodgeville, Wisc., and Schroeders Flowers of Green Bay, Wisc., both have utilized CAEP’s trainee program for more than 20 years. At meetings held in Plain and Bellevue, Wisconsin, owners Cindy Reynolds and Charles Schroeder testified to the importance of this program for their businesses.

Sen. Johnson not only responded favorably to the meetings, but he co-sponsored an amendment that was included as part of the Corker-Hoeven amendment to the Senate immigration legislation. The amendment corrected the issues that CA addressed in its meetings in Wisconsin:

- eliminate the definition of J-1 participants as ‘workers’;
- remove the J-1 program from the anti-trafficking subtitle of the bill;
- remove the definition of sponsors as ‘foreign labor contractors’; and
- eliminate the language which forbids sponsors from collecting fees.

The immigration bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support, 68-32, on June 27. CA will continue to work with members and coalitions on legislation in the House, where a bipartisan bill will face even greater challenges.