

PROPOSED LEGISLATION MAY PROVIDE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS WORK AUTHORIZATION



Kansas legislators are in a dilemma. Pressure from the local agriculture industry and other industry that are facing acute labor shortages and the possibility of introducing measures that would allow illegal immigrants to work legally in the state, has left them in a quandary. Both proponents and opponents of the matter testified before the Kansas House committee on Tuesday. Contrary to the country's overall unemployment rate, Kansas stood at less than 4 percent. Kansas known for its meatpacking plants, agricultural and the wind power and the oil and gas industry, was facing a severe worker-shortage crisis, with many companies showing losses owing to the missing manpower. The problem is that these are jobs that native Americans will just not take and the industries are heavily dependent on immigrant labor, especially Hispanic, to do their work for them. Renaldo Mesa, former president of the local chamber of commerce said, "There are a lot of jobs out here, especially out in western Kansas, that average Americans just will not take." Mesa had backed a proposal, to allow illegal immigrants to work, as a Republican member of the Kansas House of Representatives and appealed to the Federal Government for leniency for longtime residents and allow them to work and not to deport them. Kansas businesses are all supporting the proposal backed by Mesa and want the State to set up a program for illegal immigrants working in certain industries and not to jail or deport them. However, only those immigrants with no criminal records would be eligible for the program. Eligible candidates must also show a willingness to learn the English language and must have lived in the US for more than five years. Their employment would be restricted to working only in industries with severe labor shortages. For both it is a win-win situation. They get the workforce they want and the immigrants, who live in dread and are constantly looking over their shoulders; it is a path to doing lawful state authorized work. However, the Kansas proposal will not easily become law and its fate is uncertain. Can legal immigration laws be changed? The opinions show that it will be a hard stance for the states to take on what is fundamentally a federal issue. Will business interests prevail sufficiently loudly, to silence the growing chorus of vocal crusaders against illegal immigration in the country?

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