

May 18, 2006

Dear Senator,

We the undersigned write to strongly oppose the Chambliss amendments aimed at gutting the “AgJOBS” compromise contained in the Hagel-Martinez bill before the Senate. The AgJOBS language is the product of the hard work of Senators Craig, Feinstein and Kennedy in collaboration with agribusiness employers, farmworker organizations, and a bipartisan group of Members of the House. We strongly support these needed reforms for the agricultural industry and its workers and we oppose changes that would turn this balanced package into a Bracero program.

In particular, we oppose the Chambliss amendment to lower the wages for farmworkers.

**Amendment 4009 would change the AgJOBS compromise on wage rates and slash the H-2A program's already inadequate wage rates by eliminating the protection of the adverse effect wage rate and the federal minimum wage from H-2A workers.**

Currently, H-2A employers must pay the highest of three wage rates— the state or federal minimum wage, the “Adverse Effect Wage Rate” (AEWR), or the local prevailing wage. The AEWR was created under the Bracero guestworker program as a necessary protection against depression in prevailing wages (wage rates often stagnate because the guestworkers have little ability to demand higher wages). Sen. Chambliss himself described the effect of his provision as cutting H-2A program wage rates by roughly \$3.00 per hour!!

The AGJOBS compromise already addresses the H-2A wage issue. **AgJOBS would reduce the adverse effect wage rates for each state by about 10% by setting them at the rates in effect on January 1, 2003, and would then freeze the AEWR's for three years, while two studies are performed to examine H-2A wage rates and make recommendations to Congress.** If Congress were to fail to enact an adverse effect wage rate formula within 3 years, the AEWRs would be adjusted at the end of 3 years by the cost of living. The AEWR issue is a complex one and is best left to the studies agreed to in the AgJOBS compromise.

Congress should not approve amendments that will encourage the agricultural industry to hire guestworkers at depressed wages – and that is exactly what the Chambliss amendments would do. This will harm both foreign workers and U.S. workers -- and the effort should be opposed.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Catholic Charities USA

Change to Win

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Farmworker Justice

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

International Brotherhood of Teamsters

The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)

Laborers' International Union of North America

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

National Farm Worker Ministry

National Immigration Forum

National Immigration Law Center

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

UNITE HERE

United Farm Workers of America (UFW)

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)