

Submitter: Tom Hope

Re: HB2548

Dear Committee Members:

I oppose HB2548. It may be advertised as a “farm worker protection” agenda, but similar to so many other “good ideas” the original agenda is quickly subsumed by union and political agendas. Small farms will not be able to keep up with a growing bureaucracy that is unfriendly to anyone trying to run small business. Small family farms will be pushed out by the costs and time. Corporate interests who can afford to deal with the politics and bureaucracy can buy them out at fire sale prices. This will treat a family farm as if it were Tyson Foods, so that in the end, only Tyson-sized companies can afford to farm here. Of course, they have the resources to maintain relations with all the right players. Small farms do not.

Here is one example of a portion pretending to be “fair”, that isn’t: There is a requirement for the Governor to appoint nine members of an administrative board. The legislation says four members to represent interests of the farmers, four for workers and one member of the public with legal knowledge and expertise in health and safety. Who will those people be? The majority will be friendly to the Governor’s political party interests with a small number of “token” representatives of small farms. Never enough to matter. We have seen this before in other areas of our economy.

How about Oregon’s so-called “at will” employment? Who gets to decide if an employee is no longer working out? The board, not the employer. Sure, you define proper “cause”, but leave the interpretation in the hands of that same politician-appointed board, who of course have backing of all the “proper” organizations who may have financial and political interests in the future of Oregon farming. It won’t be employee protection. It will be political leverage.

What other political agendas will be applied to the backs of the family farmers? This sounds so “fair” but it will evolve to be political power much more than workers being paid and protected. If they benefit, it will only be lucky happenstance, until the farmer can no longer afford employees. As usual the administrative body who causes the chaos is immune from its effects. We already see that in so many other areas of our economy.

And of course, all this costs money, so the prices of farm products can only rise. When elections come around, the political class will always blame “greedy business” or “Washington DC”, rather than the imposition of yet another expensive political bureaucracy.

Tom Hope