

Submitter:	Steve Walser
On Behalf Of:	Willow Wind Farms
Committee:	House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic:	HB2548

I grow Organic blueberries, a very labor intensive crop. I don't object to increasing wages or providing more benefits for our farm labor in fact I would love to do so. The problem is you guys mandate expensive benefit and wage increases but you can do nothing to protect our prices so we can pay for the benefits you mandate. We live as price takers and as these mandates pile up our costs rise while the costs of our competitors do not. Your actions have the ultimate effect of moving production of our crops to Mexico or Chile or Peru where there are almost ZERO worker protections or even the ability to keep harmful, and often unregistered, pesticides from contaminating the crops YOUR constituents and families then consume!

This is exactly what happened with asparagus in Washington state where increasing labor costs ended up forcing almost all production to Mexico. Someone smarter than me needs to figure out how to protect our prices when you raise costs or the actual final effect of your mandates will be to drive more and more production out of Washington and damaging the very workers you intend to protect. You people are VERY short sighted if you think these unfunded mandates actually help our workers. For example since you mandated overtime for farm workers we have been FORCED to limit their hours to 40 hours per week. This has hurt both our farm and the very workers you sought to protect as the workers almost ALL want more hours which we can no longer provide. Their incomes have actually gone down so who, exactly, does this mandate benefit?

Don't increase mandates and drive our industry out of Washington which is exactly what your actions can cause while also increasing risk to consumers.

Thanks for your time

Steve Walser