Hansen seeks to enact new immigration to aid farmers

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U.S. Rep. George Hansen, R-Idaho, said Friday he is seeking to draft an immigration measure that will be fair to farmers who hire immigrant workers and yet adequately protect the nation's border against illegal aliens.

Hansen, a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee, said he and several congressmen are working on such legislation after House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill announced he was killing the present Employer-Sanctions Immigration Bill, known also as the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigrant Enforcement Reform Bill.

Hansen said he found the bill repugnant in several instances. He explained a strange mixture of congressmen representing farmers, blacks and Hispanics have banded together in both parties to fight the measure.

The bill passed the Senate by decisive margins both last year and this year but has been stalled in the House, Hansen said.

"We need to write a bill that will give farmers and other employers an opportunity to work through federal and state agencies in placing orders on how many people they will need for work," said Hansen in a Post-Register telephone interview from his Washington office.

"We can then have an orderly processing in bringing these immigrants to the country for seasonal work.

"We need a bill that will honestly regulate the flow of traffic at our borders but which will not discourage fair employment," said Hansen. "We are dealing here in a basic matter of the physical and economic survival of millions of people."

Hansen said proposals by opponents to present 200 to 300 amendments to the bill last year stymied the bill last year.

"I'm strongly opposed to the present bill the way it is written," said Hansen.

He said his main objection "is a provision that threatens to put farmers in jail who want to raise a crop."

He said the bill would have placed the burden of immigration control squarely on the backs of small employers by enacting punitive sanctions against those who hire illegal immigrants.

He also expressed concern that the penalities would cause many small employers to discriminate against Hispanic-Americans out of fear that their documentation is forged and that they are actually illegal immigrants.

It is the big labor interests in the Democratic Party who are taking a lead in seeking the legislation on grounds they fear the immigrants will take jobs away from Americans, he said.

"The farmers are afraid to hire anyone because of the color of their skin and they way they speak," said Hansen.

"There are rural-oriented people like myself who are trying to protect the farmers and small businessmen."

He said provisions to require the Immigration and Naturalizatin Service agents to get search warrants to enter fields of farmers and ranchers has not yet been enacted. Hansen contends such a matter is a constitutional protection but likely needs to be written into law, just as was done to protect small businessmen from the Occupational Safety and Health Agency Act agents.

Hansen said he had sent letters to his Congress colleagues, White House and Department of Justice outlining objections to the present legislation.