## CONCERN-REGARDING BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES

### HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, August 2, 2001*

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker and fellow Members of Congress, I want to alert you to a matter of concern that I have regarding business owners and their employees, particularly small business owners, within our country. This problem has been told to me by some of my constituents and is a problem about which business owners throughout the country have written to you.

We are a nation that is built upon the rule of law. This has assured a system of accountability for our conduct as individuals, businesses and institutions. Congress, as elected representatives, meets and acts to improve and refine the system in order to protect the people and their property. The foundation as framed by our nation's founders in the Constitution is the concept of due process and the right thereof. We each have the assurance that the law protects our person and property from libelous, slanderous, and otherwise tortuous interference with our reputation or business. Unfortunately, I have learned that we have within our country a private organization that with the appearance of being quasi-governmental and without any legal or regulatory oversight and control can libel and slander and tortuously interfere with a small business. They can do so with virtual immunity. This organization is the National Better Business Bureau and their franchise local Better Business Bureaus. At times, some of these bureaus classify small business owners as unsatisfactory, libel and slander them with opinion and innuendo, and provide them no due process to correct the problem. If sued in court, they argue qualified immunity under the guise of the public good. No one disputes the right of a Better Business Bureau to print facts. It is when they print falsehoods, opinion, or negative innuendo that a mechanism for redress or correction must be assured.

When closely examined, however, one finds that there are Better Business Bureaus that arbitrarily and capriciously exclude and negatively classify those they don't like. They also frequently rate companies with terrible records as being satisfactory. No written guidelines or rules are available that require the Better Business Bureau to adhere to any legal standard in their dealings with business. (With the internet, the conduct of one local Better Business Bureau is then taken as true and disseminated everywhere.) The Better Business Bureaus also charge money for these reports. They make money without responsibility for how they make it. Why are they above the law and other businesses?

On a first-hand basis, I recently inquired of the National Better Business Bureau regarding the process and I was met with hostility and rebuke. Prominent members of my community who tried to ascertain information about how to redress a concern with a local Better Business Bureau were hung up on by senior ranking National Better Business Bureau employees.

The process I have described is not in the public's best interest. It is not appropriate for us to allow our business owners and their employees, the men and women who make our country strong, to be exposed to this arbitrary and capricious process. A right to redress the actions of the Better Business Bureau when libelous, slanderous, arbitrary, or capricious action is apparent is a fundamental right we must insure. Thank you.

## ENSURE FAIR WAGES AND DUE PROCESS FOR DAY LABORERS

### HON. LUIS V. GUTIERREZ

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, August 2, 2001*

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the ''Day Laborer Fairness and Protection Act,'' a bill to ensure fair wages and due process for day laborers.

Day laborers are individuals who are hired by agencies to work on a day-to-day basis for employers who pay for the services of temporary laborers. Day labor is not of a clerical or professional nature. Most day laborers perform construction, warehouse, restaurant, janitorial, landscaping or light industrial work—often taking home far less than the minimum wage.

In the absence of federal guidelines, day laborers are often subjected to long, unpaid wait-periods before being assigned to a job. Commonly, these workers also face dangerous working conditions and are paid lower wages than full-time workers performing the same or similar jobs. Further, day laborers are frequently charged high (often undisclosed) fees for on-the-job meals, transportation to and from job sites and special attire and safety equipment necessary for jobs. Some agencies even ask workers to sign waivers in case they are injured on the job.

Partially due to these unfair labor conditions, many day laborers are caught in a cycle of poverty. A recent study by the University of Illinois Center for Urban Economic Development found that 65 percent of 510 surveyed day laborers receive $5.15 per hour. Taking into consideration the number of hours spent waiting to be assigned to work (often between 1.5 and three hours), the real value per hour of work is reduced to less than about four dollars per hour. This low figure does not reflect transportation and food and equipment fees, which are often deducted from day laborers' wages.

To address these problems, this Act requires day laborer wages that are equal to those paid to permanent employees who are performing substantially equivalent work, with consideration given to seniority, experience, skills & qualifications. Also, it mandates wages for job assignment wait-times lasting more than thirty minutes. Such wages shall be at a rate that is not less than federal or state minimum wages. Further, it requires itemized statements showing deductions made from day laborers' wages. Finally, it mandates that when a day laborer is hurt on the job, the employer who has requested the services of the day laborer provide for coverage of health care costs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this pro-labor legislation.

## ARTICLE BY FORMER SEC. BILL RICHARDSON REGARDING KAZAKHSTAN

### HON. JULIA CARSON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, August 2, 2001*

Ms. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, an article published in The Washington Times of Monday, July 30, 2001, by Mr. Bill Richardson, has especially impressed me. While world attention focuses on major nations, Mr. Richardson reminds us of the strategic importance of a lesser-known, but truly significant nation, Kazakhstan.

We remember Bill Richardson as a former member of this body; as our nation's Ambassador to the United Nations; and, as Secretary of Energy, all excellent credentials for his incisive assessment and powerful reminder of the critical geopolitical importance of Kazakhstan, bounded by Russia, China and Iran, and the enormous store of energy it holds for the world.

I commend the article and urge that my colleagues give it their attention.

[The Washington Times, Published 7/30/01]

CRAZY FOR KAZAKHSTAN

(By Bill Richardson)

As secretary of energy and ambassador to the United Nations during the Clinton administration, I traveled three times to Kazakhstan to underscore the importance of this key Central Asian country to U.S. interests. Of all the countries rising from the ashes of the Soviet Union, few offer the promise of Kazakhstan. In terms of both economic potential and political stability, Kazakhstan is critical to the long-term success of the Central Asian nations. The Bush administration should continue our policy of engaging Kazakhstan to ensure that this key country moves towards the Western orbit and adopts continued market and political reforms.

From its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 to the present, Kazak leaders have made the difficult and controversial decisions necessary to bring their country into the 21st century. In May 1992, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced that Kazakhstan would unilaterally disarm all of its nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Kazakhstan was left with the fourth-largest nuclear arsenal in the world, a tempting target for terrorists and other extremists. Mr. Nazarbayev's courageous decision to disarm in the face of opposition from Islamic nationalists and potential regional instability was one of the fundamental building blocks that have allowed Kazakhstan to emerge as a strong, stable nation and a leader in Central Asia. Then President George Bush hailed the decision as ''a momentous stride toward peace and stability.''

Since that time, Central Asia has become an increasingly complex region. Russia is reemerging from its post-Soviet economic crises and is actively looking for both economic opportunities in Central Asia as well as to secure its political influence over the region. China is rapidly expanding its economic power and political influence in the region. Iran, despite recent progress made by moderate elements in the government, is still a state sponsor of terrorism and is actively working to develop weapons of mass destruction. Many of the other former Soviet republics have become havens for religious extremists, terrorists, drug cartels and transit points for smugglers of all kind.