

STABLE JOBS WANTED

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Body

The federal immigration service has refused seasonal work visas for some 100 foreigners who who travel north from Mexico and Central American countries to muck out the stables and tend to the Thoroughbreds that race on New York's tracks.

Whoa! Let's take a look at this entry in the field.

The Citizenship and Immigration Services agency allows foreigners into the country to work on farms and provide other seasonal work when there's proof that Americans are not interested in the labor.

This makes sense, but crackdowns have led to complaints in agricultural states that growers cannot find enough workers to get crops to harvest. So it goes when the country is gripped by anti-immigrant delirium.

Here, though, the situation appears to be slightly different. The feds have denied visas on the ground that the stable work is not truly seasonal, meaning that the labor shifts to Florida in the winter. Stable operators are challenging the seasonal ruling in court.

The larger point is that workers are needed for these jobs, be they foreign- or native-born.

Come to think of it, why aren't these jobs filled by New Yorkers?

With the unemployment rate in double digits in many of the city's neighborhoods, there should be high demand for semiskilled positions. That New Yorkers do not apply for these jobs suggests two possibilities:

- a) The positions are not properly advertised.
- b) The pay and working conditions are so lousy that only the desperate sign up.

Both are undoubtedly true, and all the members of the City Council and all the members of the state Legislature who fashion themselves as champions of the working class should be ashamed for letting that happen.

Most recently, the Council has been fixated on a plan to require businesses that get economic development assistance to pay all workers a so-called living wage. This is destructive lunacy. It would put the taxpayers on the hook for subsidizing private wages while stunting job growth.

Meanwhile, the stable workers at Aqueduct, Belmont and Saratoga get paid a pitiful \$8.35 an hour and have the privilege of living in hovels that are so miserable they've shocked the conscience of the swells at swank Saratoga.

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Meanwhile, no industry in New York is subsidized by the taxpayers as generously as is the racing industry. To prop up this failing enterprise, Albany has bankrupted New York City OTB and ignored the plain language of the state Constitution by diverting lottery proceeds from education to racing by giving the tracks a cut of casino gambling revenue.

The New York Racing Association is not going anywhere and cannot do without these workers. To insist on a fair deal and decent conditions for **stable** hands will not kill **jobs**. And to demand that **stable** operators widely advertise the positions and offer training to New Yorkers is only a matter of decency. Up the pay by just a couple of bucks and improve conditions, and people will flock to apply. You can bet on it.

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