

It's messy. It's dirty. It's hard work. And I'm not talking about Congress. I'm talking about detasseling corn in Nebraska.

Though it is tough, detasseling in Nebraska has become as much a part of summertime traditions as baseball and the Fourth of July. It's a common sight to see: crews full of young Nebraskans setting out early in the morning to work in the fields under the summer sun. Though it's messy, hard work, thousands of Nebraska teenagers value the opportunity to earn good money in a few weeks' time.

But the federal Department of Labor is currently considering new rules on child labor that limit youth involvement in agricultural work, potentially including detasseling. The new rule could place age restrictions on those eligible to detassel. Many Nebraskans are rightly concerned that this regulation is unjustified and unnecessary.

I agree. It may be a foreign concept in the Beltway, but detasseling is a rite of passage for many Nebraskans. Detasseling teaches many young people the value of hard work and its rewards. While it is important to help ensure worker safety in all circumstances, this uninformed edict from Washington threatens a vital Heartland industry and an important economic opportunity for youth and others across our state.

I have registered my concerns directly to the Secretary of Labor. My office is also currently working on a bill that would exempt detasseling from this Labor rule. In addition, I have voiced concerns about the proposed rule's potential impact on family farm operations and agricultural education programs such as 4-H and FFA.

While I certainly recognize the need to protect our nation's youth, this proposed rule was written with little understanding of agriculture or how family farms operate. Quite simply, it has the potential to cause significant harm not only to farming operations, but also to our youth, who would be denied the opportunity to gain valuable skills, accept appropriate responsibilities, and contribute to the local economy.

###

