

March 9, 2006

Broadmoor lobbies for visa program

By WAYNE HEILMAN THE GAZETTE

The Broadmoor joined in a nationwide lobbying effort Wednesday in Washington, D.C., for legislation that would extend provisions of a seasonal visa program for foreign workers.

The Cheyenne Mountain Resort, meanwhile, is writing letters to members of Congress to support bills in the House and Senate that would extend the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2005 for three years until Congress can enact comprehensive immigration reform.

Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., is a cosponsor of S2284 and supports the House version of the bill, HR4740. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Rep. Joel Hefley, R-Colo., both voted for the 2005 act last year but haven't said whether they will support the extension.

Votes have not been scheduled on either bill, but Cindy Clark, The Broadmoor's human resources director who is involved in the current lobbying effort, is optimistic that an extension will be enacted before a congressional recess in August.

The Broadmoor hires about 200 foreign workers, and the Cheyenne Mountain Resort about 100 each year from April through December under the U.S. State Department's H-2B visa program for landscaping, housekeeping, laundry and similar work.

The program also is used by landscaping contractors throughout Colorado in the summer and many of the state's ski areas in the winter.

"We do a lot of recruiting locally, but can't find people who want seasonal jobs," said Clark, who was part of a lobbying effort by the American Hotel and Lodging Association aimed at generating support for the bills.

The Broadmoor received just three applications from residents for the 200 openings and Cheyenne Mountain Resort received fewer than 15 applications for its 100 openings. That's despite both hotels paying above-market wages for work at \$7.50 to \$11 an hour.

If the extension fails, the current law expires Sept. 30 and rules for the program will revert to a previous law that limited the number of the special visas to 66,000 a year. The current law divides the cap between winter and summer employers and has some exemptions.

"We have had problems in the past getting visas because the cap was already filled by the time we were allowed to apply for the visas," said Marina De Jesus, human resources director for the Cheyenne Mountain Resort. "It is very difficult to fill these positions."

CONTACT THE WRITER: 636-0234 or

wayneh@gazette.com