



# Vail Daily

## Short on solutions

*Wednesday, August 6, 2008*

Vail Daily Editorial Board

Local employers will probably be hurting for workers this ski season, thanks to the failures of our elected officials in Washington, D.C.

The U.S. is issuing only 33,000 seasonal worker visas this winter for the entire country. That means Vail Valley employers like Gary Gilman, owner of SteamMaster Cleaning and Restoration in Minturn, will be scrambling to find enough employees to meet the swell of consumer demand for local services we see during the winter months.

Gilman, who was interviewed for a story about the shortage of “H2B” visas, places the blame on Congress.

As he should. Not only did Congress fail to raise the number of H2B visas to better meet the nationwide demand for seasonal workers, lawmakers let expire a part of the immigration laws that allowed workers previously employed here to return without counting against the national cap.

If anyone thinks what goes on in Washington doesn't affect us here in the Vail Valley, think again. The good news is that while we as voters can't do much to change Washington's policies this year, we can make sure that whoever represents the Vail Valley in Congress next year will make our need for more seasonal foreign workers a priority.

In August, local Democrats will decide who will be the Democratic candidate for a seat in the House of Representatives. Boulder County dominates Colorado's 2nd Congressional District, so chances are that whoever wins the August primary will win the seat in November.

The Democratic candidates are Joan Fitz-Gerald, Jared Polis and Will Shafroth. None of their Web sites specifically address the foreign worker visa shortage that affects the district's ski resort counties. Voters can help these candidates make the foreign worker shortage a priority by pushing for more specifics during the campaign season and by demanding that whoever is elected work to expand the H2B visa program.

In the race for Senate seat representing our area, Democrat Mark Udall and Republican Bob Shaffer acknowledge the push for more foreign worker visas on their Web sites. Shaffer says on his site that “visa quotas should be based on objective labor data rather than the whims of politicians.” Udall mentions that he was a co-sponsor of a bill that would have extended the deadline to allow last season's foreign workers to return this year. Colorado's candidates for senate seem more on top of the issue, but remember that whoever wins the seat will be one of 50 who determine U.S. laws.

In the meantime, local leaders and employers would be wise to pursue local solutions to the worker shortage. Both should support the push for more affordable housing in Eagle County — including creating affordable housing themselves — because if it were more affordable to live here, it would be easier to find U.S. citizens to fill those jobs.