



Local Businesses Want Congress to Change Immigrant Visa Program

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By Nate Eaton

Eastern Idaho businesses that rely on workers from a federal immigration program could be facing trouble and if Congress doesn't act soon, you may be affected.

The federal program allows immigrants to come to America and work for up to ten months in temporary jobs. Construction, landscapers, and other outdoor companies rely on the immigrants during the summer.

Peter Romaine has been running an irrigation and water management company for the past seven years.

Peter Romaine, TBIS Irrigation and Water Management Owner: "We've been incurring about a 20 to 40 percent growth rate."

The growth has been made possible because of the federal government's H-2B visa program. Every year, Congress allows foreign workers to come to the U.S. and work in temporary jobs if American workers can't be found.

Romaine: "They've amended it every year to allow more H-2B visa workers to be allowed into the country."

Every year except this year. Six months ago, all the H-2B visas had been given out and Congress hasn't approved any more.

Romaine: "There's nothing left and there are companies all over this area right now that are in desperate need of labor force."

So some are now hiring illegal immigrants. Peter's never done that and doesn't want to.

Romaine: "I'm completely against illegal immigration."

But companies like his are stuck if Congress doesn't allow more workers. Do they hire illegals or do they lose money and possibly go out of business?

Romaine: "We'll go from a million dollars a year company to a couple hundred thousand."

Peter says it's frustrating to see other businesses breaking the law and getting work accomplished when he's done everything legal and isn't getting help from the government. He hopes that changes soon.

Romaine: "I don't really see it as a punishment as much as a lack of our government stepping up to the plate and dealing with the issue."

Peter says he's put ads in the paper and he can't get any local people to work for him.

A member of the House has introduced the "Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act." It would increase the number of temporary H-2B visas.

On Wednesday Congress will discuss the issue and businesses are hoping for change soon.