



Wednesday, March 5, 2008

## **Small Magic Valley business say temporary workers via H-2B program are needed Twin Falls, ID**



Most of the stone used in decorative monuments is taken from quarries here in southern Idaho and nearby northern Utah.

For more than 20 years, the H-2B Visa program allows visitor workers to help local quarries dig up and process decorative stones containing quartzite.

Greg Osterhout, V.P., Northern Stone Supply says, "Our typical season runs from mid-April to mid- or late October. Our quarries are at about 7000 feet, and when we run out of good weather, we just can't work there anymore."

Osterhout says his company alone hires about 60 to 80 temporary workers every year that support themselves and a dozen full time workers.

But a bill now in committee in both the U.S. House and Senate that would extend the returning worker provision, which expired in September, is being held up because some politicians have labeled it as an immigration issue, which it's not.

Osterhout says, "The fact of the matter is that the employees that work for me and the other seasonal businesses in this area don't have any desire to immigrate here. They have a desire to come and fill our seasonal need, and go back to their homes and families in Mexico."

Osterhout says last year, 15 thousand businesses across the U.S. employed temporary foreign workers through the H-2B program.

He says in some cases, many of those businesses will have to close their doors unless congress re-approves the visa program extension as soon as possible.

Osterhout says, "Call, e-mails, and letters to our representatives and our senators in Congress telling them that we care about small businesses in southern Idaho, and we need them to care, too. That's what we elected them for, and that's what we're paying them for."

Jay Michaels, KMVT News.