

Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont Construction Notes

Joanne Ray
February 19, 2008
New England Construction

Shortage of H-2B workers worries area politicians

Portsmouth, N.H. – Citing deep concern over the impact that the recent shortage of H-2B temporary worker visas is having on small and seasonal businesses, Republican U.S. Sens. Judd Gregg and John Sununu of New Hampshire recently sent a letter to Senate leaders calling for immediate legislative action to restore previous visa levels and help these businesses maintain operations.

"New Hampshire's economy — especially in the tourism, hospitality and landscaping industries — often must rely on H-2B workers to augment their U.S. work force and maintain operations," Gregg said in a joint statement with Sununu. "It is for this reason that I have worked hard to increase the available number of H-2B visas for small and seasonal businesses, including my efforts back in 2005 to pass into law the 'returning worker' exemption to the 66,000 visa cap. This exemption rightfully rewards employers and foreign workers that play by the rules and it is unfortunate that some of my congressional colleagues killed a provision in the fiscal year 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill that would have prevented the 'returning worker' exemption from expiring last fall. As a result, the number of available visas has dropped by nearly 50 percent, and many businesses in New Hampshire have now been shut out of the H-2B program for the rest of the year."

Cathy Goodwin, President of the Greater York (Maine) Region Chamber of Commerce, said a large number of seasonal summer businesses in southeastern Maine have come to rely on foreign workers to fill jobs American workers won't take.

"The pool (of available seasonal workers) continues to diminish just as more properties seek to use those who are here on these six-month visas," Goodwin said. "With the expansion going on at York Beach and college kids and college teachers no longer available, these businesses are definitely going to be impacted."