



Visa Cap Leaves Businesses Shorthanded

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BAR HARBOR (NEWS CENTER) - Memorial Day may mark the un-official start to summer in coastal communities like Bar Harbor; but before tourists arrive, local employers spend months trying to find enough seasonal workers.

For places like the Bar Harbor Inn, finding those workers has become increasingly difficult. The U.S. Government has instituted a cap on temporary work visas. The limit is 60,000.

Cathy Walton of the Bar Harbor Inn, says about a quarter of the hotel's staff work on temporary H-2B visas.

In the past, Congress granted exemptions to employees returning to work with a previous employer, but this year they did not offer that exemption. Walton says that put employers in a tough spot.

"With all the development in Ellsworth and the year round job opportunities, it is tough to fill the seasonal employment," Walton said. "There are positions that are tougher to fill than others. These positions have always been a challenge for us."

According to state labor statistics, since January, 118 businesses have applied for H-2B visas, for 2041 positions.

The state's congressional delegation is supporting a bill that would allow foreign workers to return to the states and work despite the visa cap.

Senator Susan Collins,(R-Maine) said while the bill has received support in the Senate, the House of Representatives has been reluctant to endorse the exemptions without widespread immigration reform.