

Ski resorts concerned about cap on foreign seasonal workers

By Michael Milligan

With Vermont's ski season less than three months away, Parker Riehle is concerned.

Riehle is president of Ski Vermont, an association of the state's ski areas, which welcome millions of skiers each winter.

This year, Vermont's ski resorts are worried that they may not have enough staff to adequately serve visitors because of a possible cutback in a U.S. visa program for temporary workers.

"It is a scenario that [the resorts] would prefer not to face," Riehle said.

Vermont is not alone. Similar labor shortages are expected to have a negative impact on many ski resorts throughout the U.S.

The American Hotel & Lodging Association is calling this an "imminent crisis."

Some ski resorts, anticipating staff shortages, are quietly considering curtailing certain services this winter, said Shawn McBurney, the AH&LA's senior

vice president of governmental affairs.

"It is a real quandary," he said.

The quandary stems from what the government calls H-2B visas, under which seasonal workers from other countries work in the U.S. for up to a year and then return home.



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Hank Lavery, president of Save Small Business, a Bethesda, Md.-based lobbying group, said landscapers, equestrian groups, seafood companies and other businesses are facing the same situation.

"It is really surprising how many [companies] depend on H-2B workers," said Lavery, who runs a pool company that hires

seasonal workers.

Crab fishermen, for instance, need workers for only a portion of the year.

"They need [seasonal workers] to help process the crabs for only six or eight months," Lavery said.

After the season, the H-2B workers return home and are typically rehired the following year, he said.

Since 1991, the U.S. government has capped the number of H-2B visas issued annually at 66,000. Businesses, citing the growing shortage of manual labor in the U.S., have pressed lawmakers to raise the cap.

Last year, Congress took a step in that direction.

As part of a pilot program, legislation was passed and signed into law that temporarily exempts workers who have previously received H-2B visas from being calculated in the cap.

That exemption, however, expires on Sept. 30.

A provision that would have extended the exemption for an-

other year was included in the immigration reform bill that stalled in Congress earlier this year.

Now, the hotel industry and other businesses that depend on returning H-2B workers are racing against the clock to persuade Congress to take action before the exemption expires.

Bills have been introduced in the House (H.R. 1843) and the Senate (S. 988) that would extend the exemption.

On Sept. 5 and 6, Save Small Business and the AH&LA, along with a contingent of business owners and representatives from across the country, were scheduled to lobby Congress as part of a larger effort to preserve the H-2B exemption.

But business groups say that time is running out.

"If the exemption is not renewed," McBurney said, "there are going to be a lot of resorts across the country, both ski resorts and summer resorts, that won't have enough employees to service guests."

Reroutings hurt some ports but are a windfall for others

By Johanna Jainchill

For the cruise industry, it was the familiar, late-summer hurricane dance: As Hurricane Felix was expected to slam Central America, lines began to reroute their ships. Hurricane Dean, which hit the

bad," Archer said.

Seven diverted ships called in Key West during Dean, depositing more than 15,000 additional passengers. Last week, Royal Caribbean sent the Rhapsody of the Seas to Key West instead of Jamaica to avoid Felix.

There might be 2,500 people

\$5,000,000

(agency commissions expected to be generated by "World's Largest Cruise Night" on October 17, 2007.)

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