

## **H-2B visa bill on hold until after Congress' recess**

### **Resorts may wait until January for seasonal workers**

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Congress is postponing action on H-2B, or skilled seasonal international worker visas.

"I'm afraid the H-2B situation doesn't have enough gravitas for Congress to consider it before they go on recess for the holidays," said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

The visas are generally available to international workers at area ski hills. Unfortunately, the quota of 33,000 for the visas was filled quickly after it opened on Oct. 1 for local mountains, and no exception was made for workers returning under the visa program.

In the past, Roberts said, returning workers would be granted an extension of their previous year's visa. This left many resorts scrambling for help or trying to reclassify their workers as J-1, or student visas.

Ethan Wood, an assistant lift manager at Diamond Peak ski resort said only one of five foreign lift-operators slated to work on H-2Bs were able to change over to J-1 visas.

"Getting a J-1 costs nearly \$2,000 more than an H-2B, and it's not too fair to ask those guys to do that," Wood said. So, he was left to fill four openings when Diamond Peak couldn't get the workers they needed under the H-2B quota.

In the meantime, a bill made its way to Congress' doors to extend the exception for returning H-2B workers. This would allow those who have worked on H-2B visas before to return to the U.S. without counting against the current H-2B cap.

Roberts estimates a January date for the exception bill to pass through Congress.

"Anyone who knows politics doesn't expect anything to happen fast in Washington. This is a waiting game, but we're talking to the right people like (Speaker of the House) Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and hoping to get this done right after the break," he said.

For updates on the H-2B visas, visit [www.savesmallbusiness.org](http://www.savesmallbusiness.org).