

Take immigration out of H-2B issue

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Soon, North Tahoe's ski resorts will begin their annual job fairs — seeking to fill a myriad of positions that last from the first big snow to last one. Lift operators, ticket sellers, restaurant workers and ski school employees will be hired from year-round residents, and those who travel to Tahoe just for the ski season.

The ski resorts will also be looking for employees who can fill more specific jobs in lift maintenance and management, among others. Unfortunately, jobs requiring skilled workers are becoming harder and harder to fill.

Ski resorts could put "desperately seeking" next to their ads for those positions.

This crucial industry to our economy is taking the brunt of the Congressionally-mandated cap of 66,000 on H-2B worker visas.

The H-2B worker program is used for lesser-skilled, non-agricultural workers employed in many diverse industries. It is for "temporary service or labor if unemployed persons capable of performing such service or labor cannot be found in this country."

The following are the requirements for a person to obtain an H-2B visa.

1. The job and the employer's need is one time, seasonal, peak load or intermittent.
2. The job is for no more than 10 months.
3. There are no qualified and willing U.S. workers available for the job.
4. The employer will pay the prevailing wage for the position.

Since 1990 there has been a Congressionally-mandated cap of 66,000 on the visas that can be issued annually. Last year was the first that it was reached and the limit was reached much sooner this year.

Bills in Congress to remedy the situation have been stymied until a national, unsolved debate over immigration is finished. Congress has been unwilling to tackle the H-2B problem until immigration is addressed.

This is absolutely wrong.

The H-2B worker visa program is not an immigration issue — it is an economic issue, and should be treated as such.

Immigration abuses are not coming from this program. By being unwilling to reconsider the cap, or come up with another solution, Congress is just adding another financial burden to many industries, such as the ski industry, in already hard economic times.