



## Visa limits could cause labor shortage

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The Grand Strand could be facing a labor crisis this tourist season. It's a worker shortage brought on by the debate over illegal immigration, though the people who want to work here are perfectly legal.

Over the past few years, local hotels and restaurants have relied heavily on seasonal foreign workers under the H-2B visa program.

But this year, Congress has clamped down on the number of H-2B visas it will allow.

The program has been caught up in the debate over cracking down on illegal immigration, though local hotel operators said H-2B workers have nothing to do with that.

"These are mostly, almost exclusively college students who come here for summer work programs to spend a couple of months in the United States to get to know our culture and then go back home," said Jim Eggen, general manager of the Avista Resort in North Myrtle Beach.

Eggen said he'd like to hire local people to clean rooms and do other tasks, but few locals even apply.

The labor problem has been difficult here for the past couple of years, but with Market Common, Hard Rock Park and other new properties opening up this year, 2008 could be the most difficult year yet for Grand Strand tourist businesses.

"We definitely don't have enough," Eggen said. "We barely made through last year. We were short some staff and many rooms were delayed in getting ready, so this year we expect many rooms not to be ready when guests arrive."

Eggen expects he and other managers will have to help clean rooms themselves this year.

He said if tourists have a bad experience, they may not come back and it won't hurt just his hotel, but any on the Grand Strand.

Congress has placed a limit of approving 66,000 H-2B visas for the entire country.