

## Editorial: A shallower pool

**With more restrictions on visas for returning foreign workers, some of Wisconsin's resorts are scrambling to find help. It's because of broken immigration policy.**

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For years, foreign workers from Eastern Europe flooded into Wisconsin Dells like a wave in the Big Kahuna pool at Noah's Ark. But not this year.

With summer near, businesses in the Dells, and across the nation, that rely on seasonal help won't be getting as much of it from abroad because Congress can't separate petty politics from economic need.

Increased restrictions on H-2B visas are to blame. The United States issues a paltry 66,000 such visas each year, but for the past few years, Congress has exempted from that cap foreign workers who were returning to do seasonal work. This year, though, multiple efforts to extend this exemption got bogged down in the bigger battle over immigration reform, and nothing got done. And unfortunately, nothing is likely to get done this year. The cap for summer visas was hit in January.

One complaint is that foreign workers are taking jobs that Americans could do. Tell that to the owners of the Tommy Bartlett Show or Noah's Ark. There simply aren't enough local workers interested in these jobs. In the past, some of the attractions tried to recruit youth from Milwaukee's inner city, but many of the youths found it difficult living so far away from home for the summer, and the attempt fizzled. It's worth another try.

In the meantime, some of the resorts in the Dells are hiring college workers on summer travel and work visas known as J-1s - a limited solution at best. Congress should extend the exemption for returning workers, and it should expand the number of H-2B workers who are allowed into the country.

The same is true for skilled workers. Federal authorities received 163,000 petitions earlier this year for temporary work visas for highly skilled immigrants for the year that begins Oct. 1. That's nearly twice as many as are available. The government offers only 65,000 H-1Bs for highly educated foreign workers, plus an additional 20,000 for immigrants with a master's degree or doctorate from an American university.

Such an absurdly low threshold for H-1B visas hampers American industry. Companies are trying to hire scientists, programmers and engineers from overseas because they can't find enough in the U.S. Why is this so hard to understand?

Comprehensive reform of immigration policy is way overdue. But for now, simply dealing with these critical labor shortages would be a good start.