

# Industry to USCIS: Immediate Action Needed on H-2B Visa Limit



Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

We seem to be living in two different worlds – the one in Washington, D.C., where “political posturing” reigns and the other, which is “the real world.”

So said one of the many business owners calling in to a special [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) listening session to urge immediate action on the H-2B nonimmigrant visa program. The purpose of the teleconference was to seek feedback on the impact that any potential increase in the number of H-2B workers may have on U.S. workers.

This past April, Congress reached a deal to fund the federal government through Sept. 30, the end of the current fiscal year. The language in the budget bill agreed upon by congressional negotiators gives the Secretaries of Labor and Homeland Security authority to raise the H-2B visa limit of 66,000 if they determine that there is a need. So far, they’ve not taken action.

What they would have heard if they had been a part of the listening session is that the impact of the H-2B workers on the economy (and by extension, U.S. workers) is overwhelmingly positive. By providing relief to the H-2B program and implementing the returning worker exemption – essentially doubling the 66,000 statutory limit of seasonal guest workers visas – business owners can grow their companies and provide more job opportunities for U.S. workers.

But, not everyone on the teleconference agreed.

Representatives speaking for the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), the [Friends of Farmworkers](#) and the [Economic Policy Institute](#) (EPI) opposed the need for additional H-2B visas. Speaking for the EPI, one caller said H-2B “puts downward pressure on American worker wages” and offers few labor or employment protections for seasonal guest workers. Another industry critic likened H-2B workers to “indentured servants.”

Not surprisingly, business owners participating on the call vehemently disagreed with these callers. Several owners sharply pointed out that their H-2B workers willingly return to work each season and, when new positions open up, recommend their friends or relatives for jobs, as well. As for wages, several other callers pointed out that H-2B workers are paid government-established prevailing wages, and in many cases even higher wages.

Indeed, the issue isn't so much one of wages, but of the availability of workers, caller after caller emphasized. There just aren't enough willing U.S. workers to fill the many seasonal jobs available within the U.S. economy.

Twenty six of the people commenting during the listening session say they need the workers that the expansion of the visa program via the returning worker exemption would allow. They also said immediate resumption of H-2B visa processing is critical since they still need the workers for this season. Speaking on behalf of the H-2B program were landscape company owners, seafood processors, construction contractors, amusement/carnival operators and hotel and restaurant owners.

While it's not clear just what impact the comments offered during the 90-minute listening session will have, the feedback received by the three USCIS folks was overwhelmingly pro H-2B. The message couldn't have been clearer – seasonal businesses need H-2B workers and they need them immediately given that the 2017 season is already underway.

Washington, D.C., are you listening?