

Delays in H2-B Visas Hit States Hard



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From Cape Cod innkeepers to the seafood industry in Louisiana, employers who depend on seasonal foreign workers have scrambled to fill positions this year because of wrangling in Washington over how much these workers should be paid.

At issue is a guest worker program, known as H-2B, which allows employers to hire foreigners for seasonal nonagricultural jobs when they can't find enough U.S. workers. Another program, the H-2A, is strictly for agricultural workers. Both programs are part of the alphabet soup of U.S. immigration laws that Congress is debating.

Industries crucial to state economies rely on the H-2B program, which issues up to 66,000 seasonal visas a year. These workers fan out to the crab-picking industry on Maryland's Eastern Shore, ski resorts in Colorado, shrimp processing plants in Louisiana and beach resorts in the Carolinas. They clean hotel rooms, take your dinner order, coach at your kid's soccer camp and labor on construction sites across the country.

But this year, some employers had to wait weeks longer than they had anticipated for the visas because of a controversial Obama administration proposal seeking higher wages for these workers. As the issue got mired in multiple court cases, mostly attempting to block the higher wages, processing applications for H-2B visas temporarily halted in March by a court order. When the federal government started processing applications again in April, employers say wages rose on average 30 percent.

Higher Wages Disputed

Under the Obama plan, the wage for an H2-B landscape laborer in Pennsylvania, for example, went to \$12.46 an hour, from \$8.50. A Florida amusement park attendant's hourly rate rose to \$11.60 from \$7.98. The hourly rate for a short-order cook in Massachusetts increased to \$11.59 from \$8.63 while a server there now earns \$13.01 from \$9.99 an hour, according to the H-2B

Workforce Coalition, an employers' group that opposes the higher wages.

To read the complete article in Stateline, The News Service of the Pew Charitable Trusts, click [here](#).