

Support Long Term Reform for the H-2B Visa Program

The H-2B visa program is critical to the \$69 Billion U.S. Golf Industry. According to DOL statistics, in 2006, golf facilities (including resorts) asked for approximately 26,000 H-2B visa workers – of that number over 7,700 were for golf course maintenance positions.

The program provides seasonal workers for golf facilities that have exhausted all efforts to hire American workers for their seasonal positions. Despite the extensive costs and time associated with gaining approval from four government agencies, employers use the H-2B program because they are committed to maintaining a legal workforce.

By filling temporary jobs, H-2B workers not only keep businesses open, they contribute to the creation of year-round jobs for American workers. Studies show that every H-2B position supports 4.6 American jobs.

Unfortunately, golf and the other industries that rely on the H-2B program must compete each fiscal year for a limited number of visas – 66,000. Of those 66,000, only 33,000 visas are available during the first half of the fiscal year. The remainder, including any unused H-2B visas, are available starting April 1 through September 30.

Congress included cap relief in the Fiscal Year 2017 Omnibus Appropriations bill that would have allowed almost 70,000 additional H-2B workers into the United States. Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security provided a much-reduced amount – no more than 15,000 visas – and acted only after the season began for many golf facilities and the workers could not be utilized. Those additional visas will no longer be available after September 30th.

Congress must include cap relief as part of the Fiscal Year 2018 Appropriations process. As Congress moves towards a December 8 deadline to fund the federal government through the remainder of Fiscal Year 2018, GCSAA urges appropriators to take steps to allow additional H-2B workers into the United States - beyond the 66,000 annual cap. The improving economy increases the demand on golf courses for jobs that otherwise go unfilled.

Long term H-2B visa reform legislation. GCSAA also supports long term, bipartisan comprehensive H-2B reform legislation pending in the House of Representatives and the Senate:

1. S. 792, the “Save our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2017”, sponsored by Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC).
2. H.R. 2004, the “Strengthen Employment and Seasonal Opportunities Now (SEASON) Act”

This legislation would strengthen the H-2B program with provisions dedicated to insuring its reliability for employers - including golf – including exempting returning workers from the 66,000 annual cap.

GCSAA Position on Immigration and Labor

An available, legal and trained workforce is vital to the economic success of golf facilities and a top priority for the golf industry. Bureau of Labor Statistics data demonstrates the demographic reality that the U.S. population is aging, growth in the young workforce is declining, young workers are increasingly educated and disinterested in unskilled labor jobs, and major worker shortages are forecasted especially for seasonal and less-skilled positions. Significant labor shortages will make it difficult for many golf facilities to fill both their permanent and temporary/seasonal labor needs. The nation’s golf courses cannot be sustained, or grow, without access to an adequate workforce.