

No welcome mat where it's needed

Battle over illegal immigration snags solution to shortage of seasonal visas

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EDITORIAL

Immigration seems to have receded as a hot button campaign issue, and that may be a good thing, meaning perhaps the issue can be resolved after the election, because the collateral damage from that rancorous debate is doing us no good.

Case in point: H-2B visas for seasonal nonagricultural workers. Ski resorts were hard hit by a shortage of these workers this past winter and now summer resorts, restaurants and landscapers are about to take the hit. Wisconsin resort areas such as Door County and Wisconsin Dells usually depend on these workers.

The United States issues 66,000 H-2b visas a year, half for the summer and half for the winter. The allotment of summer visas was exhausted in January.

There was a key loophole: Congress exempted returning workers from the cap. But that exemption expired last September and in the deadlock over immigration bills Congress was unable to extend it, and in the press of business, the lawmakers are unlikely to do so this year.

These exempted workers have employers who will vouch for them; they were hard working and law abiding while here; and they left when they were supposed to. Many of them are young people from Eastern Europe and the Balkans and presumably, along with a nest egg, they leave speaking better English and, one would like to think, some appreciation and fondness for the United States.

And these are the people left on the outside looking in while we devote time and money to chasing undocumented workers around an Iowa slaughterhouse. Illegal immigration is a problem to be sure, but it has caused us to neglect the people we want in our country.