

It's amazing how our politicians — many of them educated at the finest schools in the land — can be so dumb. Take the 21 geniuses running the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Do they have any idea of the problems they're causing by the way they're handling the H-2B visa program?

The legislature's failure to renew the returning worker provision of H-2B might prevent many small businesses, including golf courses, from finding necessary help. This could spell financial trouble for some golf courses, not to mention job stress for superintendents.

This mess stems from the immigration dispute. (Isn't it funny how the presidential candidates don't discuss the issue in-depth while they're campaigning?) But the H-2B program really shouldn't be debated as part of the immigration issue.

The H-2B program allows foreigners to work in the United States on temporary visas. Often, the workers take low-paying and arduous jobs that American businesses, from restaurants to golf courses, say Americans don't want. Many superintendents rely on H-2B workers to fill out their maintenance crews during the golfing months. These superintendents pay the foreign workers, mostly Mexicans and Hispanics, about \$9 to \$12 an hour to rake bunkers, dig ditches and mow roughs, among other tasks. Most of the temporary employees work hard, are satisfied with their pay and return home when their visas expire. They are not immigrants; they are visitors.

According to the H-2B program, the federal government allows 66,000 visas annually, a quota that was met this year on Jan. 2. But under the returning worker exemption in the Save Our Small Businesses Act, employers such as golf courses were allowed to bring back H-2B workers from previous years and not count them against the 66,000 cap. While the exemption expired last September, an extension was introduced to the Senate, where it passed. However, the 21-Democrat Congressional Hispanic Caucus blocked it in the House of Representatives. Rep. Joe Bacas, chairman of the caucus, said it was blocked because "the discussion over extending H-2B visas is inherently linked to our nation's greater immigration debate, and it must be resolved within that context."

The Politicians Just Don't Get It

BY LARRY AYLWARD



MISUNDERSTANDING
OF THE H-2B ISSUE
COULD HURT GOLF
COURSES AND
SUPERINTENDENTS

The immigration issue, of course, has been shelved like an old novel in this election year because the presidential candidates don't want to touch a hot potato. Meanwhile, small businesses, especially ones in the service and green industries, will suffer because they can't get good help — help that's missing in the form of about 55,000 foreign workers who weren't allowed back in the country this year because the returning worker exemption was not extended.

The politicians on the Congressional Hispanic Caucus are looking at the big picture of immigration reform, which is a huge mistake. Can't they understand that their refusal to extend the Save Our Small Businesses Act's returning worker exemption is hurting small businesses already wounded by a sputtering economy?

Considering that "finding and retaining good employees" was the biggest professional concern listed by 42 percent of 635 superintendents surveyed in a recent *Golfdom* study, the loss of H-2B workers this year could have a negative impact on the quality of conditioning at some golf courses.

This could force superintendents to increase their maintenance budgets to pay higher wages to attract more workers. That in turn could lead to higher green fees, which could lead to fewer rounds, which spells financial distress.

Also, a shaggy-looking golf course, which could occur if there's a shortage of help, could land a superintendent on the hot seat. When golfers pay thousands a year to play a high-end club, they don't want to hear excuses about why the bunkers aren't edged.

If this political mess impacts you, it's time to let your voice be heard. It's time to knock some sense into these "brainy" politicians.

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