

# Dirty Work: In-Sourcing American Jobs with H-2B Guestworkers

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Backgrounders and Reports

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Americans don't want to mow your lawn. They don't want to serve you your lobster roll sandwich during your summer holiday in Maine. They won't drive the trucks that bring food to the grocery store you shop in, or chop down the trees that produce the paper you use, or perform at the circus you attend every summer. You'll also need the helping hand of a "temporary, seasonal" guestworker to help you get on the chair lift in Vail, and to learn how to ski or snowboard. Nor will Americans guard your swim club's pool, shovel the snow in your driveway, operate the rides at the amusement park you take your kids to, tidy up the hotel room you sleep in, or process the seafood you eat. Americans can't even be counted on to coach sports, or work construction jobs. American workers have grown soft, young people don't want to work, and the unemployed don't want to do much of anything strenuous these days.

These are the kind of flawed assumptions that have led to the creation and rapid growth of the H-2B visa program, which has resulted in more half a million jobs being filled by foreign guestworkers over the last five years, rather than Americans and immigrants already in the United States.

Despite the significant impact that the H-2B visa program has on American workers, the program receives scant media coverage compared to other guestworker categories. Issues surrounding the issuance of H-1B visas, for example, tend to receive far more media scrutiny because the beneficiaries and the victims are highly educated and often fall within the same social circles as journalists, and the topic of higher-paying skilled jobs is perceived to be more relevant to the kind of readership and viewership that advertisers desire. As the global recession continues to take its toll on the American economy, this is an opportune time to re-examine the H-2B program and to evaluate whether these jobs could be filled with people already in the United States. The goal of this report is to shed light on the poor conditions that H-2B guestworkers often toil in; to expose the damage that this program does to the most vulnerable sector of American workers: the poorly educated, students, minorities, and legal immigrants; to examine the recruiters who find workers and the employers who hire them; and to scrutinize the government's role in sanctioning and managing the H-2B bureaucracy.

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