

Changes to worker visas could affect ski industry

By Nancy Lofholm, Denver Post

Sen. Mark Udall of Colorado has added his voice to mounting pressure on the State Department to improve oversight of a 50-year-old foreign-exchange visitor program that has morphed into a conduit for guest workers and is drawing fire for siphoning jobs from American workers.

The Democrat wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton last week asking her to outline what steps the department has taken to end misuse of the J visa program that has more than 350,000 foreign workers in U.S. jobs.

The J visa program was created to promote cultural and educational exchange as a tool to enhance diplomatic ties abroad. In its inaugural year, about 50,000 visas were issued under the program. The program, with 16 classes of J visas, has participants in a wide variety of occupations, including au pair work, farm labor and seasonal jobs at national parks, ski resorts, hotels and restaurants.

Colorado leads the country in numbers of foreign students working on J-1 visas, the type that bring foreign college students to America to fill seasonal jobs for four-month periods.

Udall's letter to Clinton was prompted by a recent *Denver Post* article about J-1 visas and by three independent and governmental reports that have outlined problems in the program.

"Mark is following up on reports of weak oversight of the program. He's asking for a review to see what measures the State Department has taken to ensure that the proper

guidelines are being upheld for hiring through the J visa visitors program and that American workers are not inadvertently hurt," said Udall spokeswoman Tara Trujillo.

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