



New Rules on US Summer Jobs for Foreign Students

This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

More than one hundred thousand international students will spend this summer working and traveling in the United States. They are participating in the Summer Work Travel program through the State Department. They receive J-1 exchange visitor visas.

The idea is for students to work for up to three months and earn enough money to then spend a month traveling before they return home.

The Summer Work Travel program has existed for years. This year there are some changes. The State Department recently amended the employment rules. These changes follow a strike last summer by foreign students working at a distribution center for Hershey's chocolates.

The State Department said the students were put to work for long hours in jobs that provided little or no contact with the outside world. The students complained about having to lift heavy boxes and to work overnight.

They and other workers protested conditions at the plant in Palmyra, Pennsylvania. The students also complained about being underpaid as a result of deductions from their earnings. Some of their pay had to go to subcontractors involved in the operations.

The State Department has now banned the use of Summer Work Travel students in warehouses or packaging plants. Also, the majority of their work hours cannot fall between ten at night and six in the morning. The students are also barred from jobs in workplaces that the federal Labor Department says are unsafe.

More jobs will be banned in the fall. These include most construction, manufacturing and food processing jobs. Summer Work Travel students will also not be allowed to work in most mining and agricultural jobs.

Daniel Costa at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington welcomed the new limits on jobs that the students can fill.

DANIEL COSTA: "That is good because it will protect the actual foreign workers

from getting injured on the job. It also protects U.S. workers, because there is high unemployment in a lot of those occupations."

He also praised a requirement that employers only fill temporary or seasonal jobs with Summer Work Travel students. He noted that some employers have continually hired new student workers to avoid having to hire regular full-time employees.

Jacob Horwitz is lead organizer for the National Guestworker Alliance, the group that organized the strike in Palmyra.

JACOB HORWITZ: "The changes to the J-1 rules really recognize the demands that the students put forward, and both add a whole set of protections and changes that protect local workers who work in industries that use guest workers and also protect future J-1 students."

He says the State Department's changes will help return the program to its original purpose as a cultural exchange program.

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report, written by Jerilyn Watson. I'm Jim Tedder.