

Senate upholds veto of logger bill

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AUGUSTA — A bill that would have prohibited the state from signing logging contracts with companies participating in the federal bonded labor program was dead Wednesday after the Maine Senate voted 18-16 to uphold Gov. Paul LePage's veto of the bill.

The program, known as H-2A, allows logging companies harvesting timber in the U.S. to contract foreign workers. H-2A is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor for employers who anticipate a shortage of domestic workers.

LD 340, sponsored by Sen. Troy Jackson, D-Allagash, sought to prohibit the state from participating in the program because proponents believe some companies are hiring cheaper Canadian labor while Maine loggers remain out of work.

The bill originally passed the Senate, 32-3, and the House, 78-62.

LePage announced Tuesday that he would veto the bill because it was unconstitutional. Gov. John Baldacci took the same action on a similar proposal approved by the Legislature several years ago. Baldacci at the time promised to work out a deal to address the issue.

Jackson said Wednesday the bill's constitutionality wasn't the problem because the state was not required to participate in the H-2A program. But Jackson said the state was reluctant to take that route because it had been swayed by the influence of the forest products industry, which, he said, benefited from the cheaper labor.

The veto override effort failed despite several Republicans siding with the Democratic minority.

Barbara Bush