

High-Tech Companies Laud Senate Immigration Bill

The key provision sought by technology companies was an expanded high-tech visa program, and they got it. The Senate bill proposes raising the cap on H-1B visas for highly educated temporary workers to 115,000 per fiscal year, a huge jump from the current 65,000.

By George Leopold, [EE Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. high-tech lobby got most of what it wanted in an immigration reform bill approved by the Senate late Thursday (May 25).

The key provision sought by technology companies was an expanded high-tech visa program. The controversial Senate immigration bill includes a provision raising the cap on H-1B visas for highly educated temporary workers to 115,000 per fiscal year. It also provides exemptions from both H-1B and employment-based, or "green card," visa caps for foreign workers with [advanced degrees](#) in science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

"These individuals—many with degrees from U.S. universities—play a critical role in the U.S. economy," John Castellani, president of the Business Roundtable, said in a statement. "It is therefore paramount that we update our immigration policy so that these talented individuals can come here to work for U.S. companies—not foreign competitors."

High-tech companies have complained that the current limits on H-1B visas were reached in August 2005, effectively preventing them from hiring more skilled foreign workers until October 2006.

According to proponents of the Senate measure, the annual H-1B visa cap would be raised by 50,000 a year from the current 65,000 per year. It would also create what is being called a "market-based cap" to allow for future increases in the visa limits. It also would raise the green card cap to 650,000 for fiscal years 2007 through 2016.

"The H-1B and green card reform legislation passed by the Senate [Thursday] would help technology companies in their efforts to hire and retain the talented workers who are essential to remaining competitive," Semiconductor Industry Association President George Scalise said in a statement.

While there is widespread support in the House for expanding the high-tech visa program, that body has approved a much tougher version of the comprehensive immigration bill. Observers said it remains unclear whether a House-Senate conference can resolve political differences over immigration reform.

Also unclear is whether President Bush would sign an immigration bill that doesn't include a guest-worker program.