



Pfizer In The Middle Of Visa Debate

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Over the years, U.S. Sens. Christopher J. Dodd and Joe Lieberman have collected tens of thousands of dollars from Pfizer Inc.'s political action committee.

Critics say that not so coincidentally the two Connecticut senators have supported expansion of the United States' guestworker visa programs like the H-1B that Pfizer, among other companies, has used to systematically outsource hundreds of American jobs.

[View Pfizer's letter to Dodd and Courtney](#)

"If you think that any Democrat is going to stop the flood of illegal and legal immigrants that take American jobs, well, you must be fresh out of the box," said Paul Streitz, director and co-founder of the Darien-based Connecticut Citizens for Immigration Control, which includes a picture of former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin on its Web site along with a pitch to "Vote Sarah 2012."

Neither Dodd nor Lieberman, both Democrats, would directly address questions about their records, but each, in statements through their press offices, defended their votes on guestworker visas.

"Sen. Dodd expects Pfizer - and all Connecticut companies - to both fully comply with the intent of the H-1B program and to do all they can to preserve jobs in Connecticut," Dodd spokesman Bryan DeAngelis said in a statement. "Dodd will continue to work on this issue in the new Congress and work toward reforming the H-1B program."

"The H-1B program helps firms fill critical positions if they are unable to identify and recruit American workers for the job, but the program was never intended to help firms outsource their operations by training foreign workers here at home," Lieberman's press secretary, Erika Masonhall, said in a statement.

Yet sources have told The Day that guestworker visas have been used at Pfizer campuses in Groton and New London over the past three years to transform a largely American information-technology contracting force into a place more and more composed of foreign nationals.

According to sources who asked not to be identified for fear of being fired, the effort is part of a plan to outsource much of the company's local information technology work from American contractors to outside contracting firms that hire employees largely from India.

Critics have said the H-1B program has been used over the years as a way of allowing major multinational corporations to outsource thousands of American jobs and save companies millions of dollars. They said the outflow of jobs to other countries is particularly unconscionable in the midst of a prolonged recession that resulted in more people being unemployed last month than at any period in the past 26 years.

Pfizer, in a letter last month to Connecticut congressmen, said it does use third-party IT vendors that employ foreign nationals, but pointed out that Pfizer has no role in petitioning for the guestworker visas used by these companies. It added that Pfizer has only 60 employees company-wide with H-1B visas, none of whom came to the United States "to replace their fellow colleagues in Groton and New London as has been alleged in the media."

Several sources have said that foreign IT workers at the local campuses, employed by Indian outsourcing companies

such as Infosys Technologies and Satyam Computer Services, are being used to replace American contractors.

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, called a week ago for a government study of the H-1B program. He did not call specifically for an investigation of Pfizer's outsourcing efforts, but his interest in the H-1B issue was piqued by the local controversy, he said.

Critics of guestworker visa programs - and of Congress's inability to reform them to protect American workers - said this week that the Government Accountability Office already has investigated the program, most recently in 2003. Yet Congress, they said, has yet to pass legislative reforms to deal with program problems, which range from lack of enforcement to fraudulent applications.

The original intent of the H-1B program was to bring in foreign workers with special skills when American workers couldn't be found and to pay these workers the prevailing wage. But legislative loopholes, according to critics, now allow companies to look for foreign workers first, pay them less than the prevailing wage, cycle guestworkers through as part of outsourcing efforts and sometimes force American workers to train their replacements.

"While it's wonderful that Courtney wants to do another GAO study of H-1B, he could use the ones that have already been completed, and then he could actually propose legislation that actually does something to alleviate the problems," said Rob Sanchez, a former Arizona software engineer who lost his job to outsourcing, writing in his Job Destruction Newsletter last week. "The sad reality for the Pfizer people is that studies and new legislation will come far too late to save what's left of the jobs there."

Similarly, Sanchez, who now runs a think tank focusing on guestworker visas and outsourcing issues, said he appreciated a letter Dodd and Courtney sent to Pfizer questioning the company's use of guestworker visas, "but it does nothing to stop Pfizer from replacing its U.S. workers with H-1B visa holders." Furthermore, he said, "it would be even better if Dodd sponsored some serious legislation to stop the abuse."

The anti-immigration group Americans for Better Immigration has given both Dodd and Courtney a D-minus grade on guestworker-visa votes during their careers, though Courtney's grade is based on only one vote. Lieberman has earned an F.

Sanchez is among those who have been critical of the Connecticut delegation's votes on the H-1B issue. He particularly points to Dodd, who once sponsored a bill that "would have put some mild restrictions on offshoring government contracts" - a bill that died quickly and, in any case, included only "superficial reforms."

"Dodd ... has consistently voted for H-1B increases as well as other types of guestworker visas," Sanchez said. "Dodd has given lip service to protect Americans from unfair competition due to the use of H-1Bs or offshoring, while voting to make the problem worse."

Dodd's legislative aides defend his record, pointing out several measures the senator has supported over the years, including the addition of a six-month waiting period before companies could begin replacing American workers with H-1Bs. Dodd also has called for the U.S. Department of Labor to have more power to investigate abuses of the H-1B program, aides said.

Lieberman, who twice wrote white papers describing abuses in the H-1B program, has since become a solid supporter of guestworker increases and has spoken out in favor of a new move by the Department of Homeland Security that critics said would amount to a de facto H-1B increase.

He also is one of 37 U.S. senators who signed on as an original member of the Friends of India caucus, an indication, said Sanchez, of "who his daddy is."

"He's obviously working against American workers," said Ron Hira, an assistant professor of public policy at Rochester Institute of Technology who has written widely about the H1-B visa program and its abuses.

Lieberman's aides, however, point to his record of pushing reforms, including a prohibition against advertising a job that gives preference to guest workers and a requirement that companies have no more than half their workers on H-

1Bs.

Pfizer PAC money

Dodd has been among the largest beneficiaries of funds from the Pfizer PAC, having received \$28,000 in the past seven years, according to the political action committee's records. He also received a contribution last year of \$2,300 from the U.S. India PAC.

Lieberman, in the same period, has received slightly less than \$14,000 from the Pfizer PAC. A database search showed he has not received any money from the U.S. India PAC.

Courtney has taken in about \$11,500 in the past three years from the Pfizer PAC.

"The money clearly influences how the politicians approach anything that has to do with Pfizer's interests," said Hira, the Rochester Institute professor.

But Connecticut politicians, through their spokesmen, said Pfizer PAC money has not influenced their votes. Their views on the H-1B program were staked out years before they received any money from the PAC, said aides for Dodd and Lieberman.

Joan Campion, a Pfizer spokeswoman, said money is doled out in a bipartisan fashion to politicians who are supportive of the pharmaceutical industry. She noted that an employee steering committee decides on how much money to give.

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