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## **Congress Considers Massive H-1b Visa Expansion, Gates Tells Congress It's Microsoft's Top Priority**

By Marcus Courtney

Seattle-Congress is contemplating legislation that would allow up to 600,000 skilled professional guest workers to enter the U.S. in a single year. This would be the biggest one time expansion of the controversial H-1b visa program to date.



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This increase comes after the high-tech industry is just beginning to recover from the economic recession of 2001, as a small demand for workers has been noticed.

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) is drafting an immigration reform bill that contains the expansion of the H-1b visa program. Sen. Specter chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over immigration matters.

Microsoft's Bill Gates is spending his own personal political capital on this issue. He was in Washington D.C. last week lobbying for the changes. According to Washington Post columnist David Broder, "Gates told me the "high-skills immigration issue is by far the number one thing" on the Washington agenda for Microsoft and for the electronics industry generally "This is gigantic for us." The article went on to say, "So great is the demand for such skills in the burgeoning high-tech world," However, government studies have dismissed the notion the industry is facing a worker shortage.

Last week, WashTech News released information showing that wages at Microsoft have been stagnant for several years in the majority of pay scales. If a real skill shortage existed, as Mr. Gates claims, pay should be increasing not stagnating at his company.

In an analysis done by the AFL-CIO Department of Professional Employees, the bill would:

- Mandate a retroactive increase to 195,000 from the current 65,000 H-1B visa cap (exclusive of existing exemptions) for the years of 2004-2006, in effect allowing for a one-time visa grab by employers of nearly 400,000 visas!
- Increase the 65,000 visa cap to 115,000," a 60% hike!
- Require an automatic 20% annual hike in the new cap whenever the visas are exhausted, thus establishing a new annual cap for each successive year. This, in effect, rips the lid off of any meaningful annual visa limitation.
- Add still another open-ended exemption from the cap for any foreign national that has an advanced degree in science, technology, engineering or math from anywhere on the planet. At least the previous exemption authored by the committee restricted such visas to foreign graduates of U.S. institutions and limited it to

20,000 annually.

“Taken together, within one year over 600,000 new foreign professionals could flood the U.S. market, the result of which would be to inflict serious economic harm on highly skilled, well-educated American workers,” said the analysis.

Marcus Courtney is the President of WashTech/CWA Local 37083. He can be reached at [courtney@washtech.org](mailto:courtney@washtech.org)