
YES vs NO on H-1B

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It's very rare to see a point/counterpoint argument in the newspapers, especially on immigration related topics. Instead we usually only get to read one-sided stories that support increased levels of immigration. The DC Examiner broke the mold by featuring a debate on the H-1B issue.

In the first op-ed, Gene Nelson, on behalf of American workers, opposes H-1B.

In the second op-ed, Stuart Anderson, on behalf of the cheap labor lobby, supports H-1B.

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[http://www.dcxaminer.com/opinion/columns/guestcolumnists/NO Foreign workers take jobs away from skilled Americans.html](http://www.dcxaminer.com/opinion/columns/guestcolumnists/NO_Foreign_workers_take_jobs_away_from_skilled_Americans.html)

NO: Foreign workers take jobs away from skilled Americans

By Gene Nelson

Special to the Examiner | 8/20/08 10:39 PM Wealthy advocates of H-1B visas have industriously worked to keep this employer-designed program hidden from middle-class Americans, who are outraged when they learn how it harms them.

In 2002, Nobel economics laureate Milton Friedman correctly identified the 1990 H-1B visa program as a "government subsidy" because it allows employers access to imported, highly skilled labor at below-market wages.

False allegations of worker shortages have been a popular approach. But American colleges and universities graduate four to six times the number of students needed to fill openings in technology fields that are generated by retirements and business expansion.

Consequently, since 1960, there have been more than 30 million graduates with

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bachelor s degrees who are qualified to work as scientists, engineers, computer programmers and mathematicians (the STEM fields) pursuing approximately 8 million "high tech" positions requiring this level of training. The importation of foreign technical professionals further swells the job-seeker ranks.

Between 1975 and 2005, more than 25 million admissions were approved in just five highly skilled visa programs.

Former Microsoft lobbyist Jack Abramoff helped direct \$100 million in political expenditures between 1995 and 2000, enabling Microsoft and other employers to procure employer-friendly changes to H-1B visa legislation in 1996, 1998 and 2000. As a result of this work force glut, real wages in STEM fields have remained flat since at least 2000.

Contrary to Stuart Anderson s claim, this program prevents innovation since American citizens are typically discarded by employers by age 35 -- before their inventions can be turned into practical revenue generators.

It facilitates hiring discrimination against Americans. In the April 15, 2007, edition of the New York Times, Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath called H-1B the "outsourcing visa."

This program also undermines national security, as 200,000 U.S. science and engineering jobs have already been lost to communist China.

In the late 1980s, bureaucrats at the National Science Foundation found that they could increase the supply of technical professionals by importing them -- offering foreign nationals the prospect of remaining in the United States.

This increase in supply depresses wages -- an important policy objective.

One measure showing that this government intervention was successful (at least from the employers perspective) is that a typical postdoctoral research or teaching position in a STEM field (requiring 12 years of education after high school) offers pay and benefits comparable to what a high school graduate earns managing a fast-food restaurant.

University of California at Davis computer science professor Norm Matloff recommends sharply diminishing the size of the H-1B program to about 15,000 admissions annually so that it is only used to import "the best and brightest" -- rather than the "fresh [inexpensive] young blood" of average talent currently imported from the developing world.

In a 1993 article in the American Scholar, CalTech Vice Provost David Goodstein pointed out that the American taxpayer is forced to support extremely expensive research universities whose main purpose is to train students from abroad who will stay here and take jobs that could have gone to Americans, or go home and take our knowledge and technology with them. We are ignoring our own students and using our money to train our economic competitors.

This piece is part of an American Conversation in the Examiner, featuring both pro and con views. Please click here to read the other side of the argument.

Gene Nelson, an advocate for the employment rights of American technical professionals since 1979, works as an IT professional at NumbersUSA.com in Arlington.

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http://www.dcxaminer.com/opinion/columns/guestcolumnists/YES_US_firms_need_all_the_technical_talent_they_can_get.html

YES: U.S. firms need all the technical talent they can get

By Stuart Anderson

Special to the Examiner | 8/20/08 10:42 PM American companies do not hire skilled foreign nationals for "cheap labor," as critics like Gene Nelson allege (they must be paid the same as comparable Americans), but because they represent a key part of the global labor pool for technical talent.

For large companies, U.S. immigration policies dictate whether these talented people are hired to create jobs and innovations here in the United States or in offices overseas. The lack of an available visa means smaller companies may lose out on hiring a key foreign-born individual needed to grow the company.

U.S. companies hire as much talent as possible, primarily Americans. Government data show that nearly all companies in the United States employ 85 to 99 percent Americans, or permanent residents who can become Americans.

But when U.S. employers recruit on college campuses, they find foreign nationals often make up half or more of the graduates in the fields in greatest demand, such as computer science and electrical engineering.

H-1B visas are important because they are essentially the only way international students at U.S. universities and outstanding individuals seeking to come here from abroad can stay and work in the United States long

term. These temporary visas, which are renewable after three years, are generally good for six years.

In April, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services announced it received more than enough applications for H-1B visas to fill its quota of 65,000 for fiscal 2009 (which starts Oct. 1), as well as enough applications for the additional 20,000 H-1B slots reserved for foreign nationals with advanced degrees from U.S. universities. This marks the fifth year in a row that the H-1B quota had been reached before the fiscal year started.

One of the myths surrounding H-1Bs is that Indian companies get most of them, even though U.S. government data show Indian-based firms received only about 10 percent in 2007. In fact, more than 25,000 individual U.S. employers hired skilled professionals on H-1B visas in 2007, according to the immigration service.

An employment-based green card is necessary to stay in the country permanently and later become a citizen. A separate quota for green cards (permanent residence) for skilled immigrants is set at 140,000 a year.

That quota has also been insufficient to meet demand. Typically, a skilled immigrant now has to wait five to 10 years for a green card, causing some to give up and others to not even begin the process.

Recent research from the National Foundation for American Policy found that major U.S. technology companies today average more than 470 U.S.-based job openings for skilled positions (bachelor's degrees or above), while defense companies have more than 1,265 each.

Another NFAP study found that contrary to concerns that skilled foreign nationals harm the job prospects of Americans, H-1B visa holders are more likely to complement U.S. workers and create jobs.

The study found that for every H-1B position requested with the Department of Labor, U.S. technology companies increased their employment by five workers. Many U.S. executives confirm this experience at their own firms.

Congress should increase the H-1B visa cap, address the large pent-up visa demand and not count those who have received a master's degree or above against the annual quota. Lawmakers should also significantly raise employment-based immigration quotas (green cards) for those seeking to stay here permanently, such as through legislation recently introduced by Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif.

Adopting these measures would place U.S. companies in a more competitive position internationally and set America on the path to maintaining its edge in innovation and job creation in the 21st century.

This piece is part of an American Conversation in the Examiner, featuring both pro and con views. Please click here to read the other side of the argument.

Stuart Anderson, a former staff director of the Senate immigration subcommittee, is executive director of the National Foundation for American Policy.

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