



900 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202.783.0070
Fax: 202.783.0534
Web: www.ccianet.org

ABSTRACT

Computer & Communications Industry Association

IMMIGRATION/VISA POLICY

MAY 2010

- *U.S. technology companies require continued access to the highly skilled foreign nationals who currently make up the U.S. shortfall in science and engineering students. This foreign talent complements, rather than competes with, the U.S. labor pool.*

Background: The U.S. technology industry has been the engine of growth for the U.S. economy. Growth has depended on the industry's ability to continue its rapid technological advancement to continue to come up with "the next big thing." The U.S. must remain the global center of innovation. In order for the U.S. to maintain its leading role, the industry must recruit the best and the brightest minds from around the world.

While it may be preferable for the "best and the brightest" to be homegrown, the reality is that fewer U.S. students are pursuing advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Foreign nationals involved in advanced research in universities and laboratories across the country have made up for this shortfall. U.S. companies must have continued access to such talented individuals.

CCIA's Position: If U.S. companies are to maintain their global competitiveness, the nation must remain the world's IQ magnet. Many of the highly skilled foreign nationals that companies wish to hire using H-1B visas are already here doing research at U.S. universities. If these highly qualified people, who have been trained and educated at our own universities, cannot be hired by U.S. companies, they will have no choice but to return to their home countries and put their skills to use there. In effect, U.S. universities would be training our nation's competition. A targeted visa policy that allows U.S. companies to hire the highly skilled foreign nationals they need will be an incentive for companies to locate and expand their projects domestically, rather than moving jobs overseas.

Ideas and research are the raw materials with which the technology industry is built. We must be able to take advantage of the skilled workers who train in the U.S. and use them for the benefit of our economy, not drive them into the waiting arms of our overseas competitors under a policy of human protectionism. In a global economy, the competition for talent is also global. If innovation is to lead the U.S. from recession and to a new economic model, we need to welcome and utilize the research & development skills of those who are willing to leave their home countries to invest themselves and their intellectual capital here. Foreign nationals make significant contributions to international patents filed in the U.S.

CCIA supports reforming the H-1B temporary work visa and employment-based permanent worker visa programs. In particular, a flexible market-based H-1B visa cap and an exemption from the cap for foreign nationals with advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are critical to our industry and to U.S. competitiveness. The employment-based

(EB) green card system, which enables skilled foreign nationals to make long-term contributions to the U.S. economy, must be streamlined to reduce the backlogs that currently leave valued professional workers (and their employers) in procedural uncertainty for years.

Current Issues: The Obama administration has stated that it intends to address immigration this year. CCIA welcomes this and also looks forward to Congressional action. Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) of the Immigration Subcommittee on the Judiciary Committee in the House, and Chairman Charles Schumer (D-NY) of the Immigration Subcommittee on the Judiciary Committee in the Senate have both expressed their intention to pursue comprehensive immigration reform. Sen. Schumer and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) have laid out a blueprint for reform, which includes “developing a rational legal immigration system” and would award green cards to immigrants with advanced degrees in STEM fields. CCIA looks forward to the introduction and debate of a reform bill that addresses the broken immigration system for skilled workers.

However, the skilled immigration situation remains in need of immediate attention. While the economic situation last year resulted in a decrease in the number of H-1B applications, and the visa cap was not hit in early April as in recent years, the cap was reached in December 2009. A flexible market-based cap would be able to adjust to fluctuations in demand. In addition, there is an increasing focus on the availability of green cards as a more long-term, and therefore more appropriate, vehicle for securing skilled foreign workers. CCIA will continue to push for enactment of a long-term solution that addresses both the H-1B cap and the backlog in employment-based green cards. Our industry must be able to both attract and keep the global talent it needs.