

I urge you to take immediate steps to address an American business crisis. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services received on April 2--the first day H-1B applications could be filed for fiscal year 2008--a volume of applications well in excess of the 65,000 annual limit. This creates an unprecedented eighteen-month restriction on access to new H-1B visas for temporary professional employees. This blackout on new H-1B visas, coupled with a continually growing employment-based (EB) green card backlog for permanent hires, puts American businesses at severe disadvantage in the global economy.

The H-1B visa program is utilized by U.S. businesses and other organizations to augment the existing labor force with foreign workers in specialty occupations that require expertise in a specialized field. Typical H-1B occupations include scientists, architects, engineers, computer programmers, teachers, accountants, and doctors.

This dire situation shows the inadequacy of the current quota for H-1B workers. More egregious is the fact that this problem was completely foreseeable, yet Congress chose to do nothing about it last year. In the fiscal year now in effect, the supply of such visas lasted less than eight weeks after the filing period opened. Not surprisingly, for the fiscal year that starts October 1, 2007, the supply did not last through even the first day.

The H-1B and EB visa programs are vital tools necessary to keep the U.S. economy competitive in the world market and to keep jobs in America. Far from harming U.S. workers and the U.S. economy, highly educated foreign professionals benefit our country by allowing U.S. employers to develop new products, undertake groundbreaking research, implement new projects, expand operations, create additional new jobs, and compete in the global marketplace. As President Bush has remarked, if these professionals are not permitted to come to the U.S. to share their expertise, they will go to other countries and benefit companies abroad instead. The end result will be American jobs lost and American projects losing out to foreign competition, with devastating long-term consequences for the U.S. economy.

Every day that passes without access to these high-skilled workers is a lost opportunity for growth, productivity, and innovation. The best way to resolve this crisis is for Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration reform measure as soon as possible. Any reform must include an increase in the H-1B quota.