

American Competitiveness: Developing a Highly Skilled Workforce

Background: A well-educated, robust workforce is fundamental to the sustainability of the American economy. Highly educated workers add value to the labor force by increasing productivity, strengthening research capabilities, and developing innovative products. In today's global economy, American businesses compete with companies from around the world for the best and brightest employees.

The Challenge: American businesses must have access to the individuals who will help develop tomorrow's technological innovations and keep America's economy growing strong. U.S. policy should provide both long- and short- term solutions to help strengthen the U.S. workforce.

The Solution: In the long-term, the U.S. needs a coordinated strategy to expand the education pipeline for American students studying science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). In the short-term, we need a commonsense approach to immigration policy that creates incentives for both U.S. and foreign workers to develop valuable skill sets that can be used to contribute to U.S. economic growth.

Cultivate engineers and scientists in the U.S. who will drive innovation.

- Double the number of American students who earn baccalaureate and advanced degrees in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) by 2015 through increased investment in America's math and science education programs.
- Exempt foreign students who have earned advanced degrees from U.S. universities in STEM fields from the caps on H-1B non-immigrant visas and employment-based immigration visas.
- Streamline the path to permanent resident status for all foreign graduates who have recently earned advanced degrees from U.S. universities who have job offers from U.S. employers.

Attract the best and the brightest who will sustain our competitiveness.

- Use market-based tools rather than artificial quotas to determine the number of available H-1B non-immigration visas for highly educated workers.
- Establish a market-based determination for the number of permanent visas granted for employment-based immigration in order to avoid unnecessary backlogs. Eliminate country-based quotas.
- Enable trusted employers who maintain solid occupational requirements to be "pre-certified" for application approval as long as the individual foreign national passes credentials and background checks.
- Direct user fees paid by employers to be used to ensure the Department of Homeland Security meets the congressionally mandated application processing times of 30 days for non-immigrant status and 6 months for permanent status.
- Ensure the immigration system is flexible to respond to changing business needs, new employment opportunities, or delays in the immigration system itself. For example, L-1 non-immigrants are not eligible for extensions beyond their fifth or seventh year, and PERM may not adequately ensure 7th year extensions of H-1B.
- Support initiatives to reduce the continued delays in visa processing times at foreign consulates and other application processing sites.

For More Information:

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