

Immigration Policy Center (IPC)

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in the United States.

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This Week's Immigration *OnPoint* Highlights

The U.S. Economy Still Needs Highly Skilled Foreign Workers: And Arbitrary Caps on H-1B Visas Still Don't Meet that Need

Immigration OnPoint: Facts at Your Fingertips for Frequently Asked Immigration Questions

Although the recent downturn of the U.S. economy has caused unemployment to rise in some industries, like construction, it has done little to dampen the perennially strong demand for skilled workers in high-tech companies, universities, and research institutes. Yet policymakers continue to impose an arbitrary numerical cap of 65,000 per year on how many new H-1B visas can be granted to highly skilled workers from other countries, plus another 20,000 per year for foreign graduates of advanced degree programs at U.S. universities. For years, this cap has not come close to meeting demand. For instance, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) began accepting H-1B applications for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 on April 1—and announced on April 8 that it had been inundated by roughly 163,000 applications, would not accept any more applications, and would award the available slots for FY 2009 by computer lottery.

A June 4 *Washington Post* editorial, “[A Recipe for Weakness](#),” argues that “few policies match this one in terms of sheer irrationality, and few will do as much damage to this country’s long-term prospects and competitiveness.” The editorial goes on to note that “American-born scientists and PhDs are in short supply and that technology companies, among others, are clamoring to hire qualified foreigners, particularly those trained at U.S. universities.” Moreover, the editorial points out that “during the 10 years that ended in 2005, foreign-born strivers started a quarter of the new engineering and technology firms in this country. A similar proportion of international patent applications filed in the United States in 2006 originated with immigrants.”

This week IPC highlights:

- [The U.S. Economy Still Needs Highly Skilled Foreign Workers](#). This document argues that arbitrary numerical limits on H-1B visas do nothing to “protect” the jobs of U.S. workers. Drawing upon recent studies from the National Foundation for American Policy and the Peterson Institute of International Economics, as well as data from the National Science Board, the report makes the case that the presence in a company of highly skilled foreign workers whose abilities and talents *complement* those of native-born workers actually *creates* new employment opportunities for American workers. The report concludes that access to highly skilled workers from abroad is essential to the long-term international competitiveness of the U.S. economy.

As both the IPC report and the *Washington Post* editorial make clear, the highly skilled foreign workers who come to the United States on H-1B visas are an asset to the U.S. economy, not a threat.

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