

# H-1B Answer: Innovation

April 13 2007

---

What technology company executive doesn't champion innovation? Innovation is held up as the holy grail of high tech. Innovation promises to better the world, raise living standards and provide a good job for everyone.

I'm sorry to report that innovation often is better championed in concept than in reality. Innovation gets trumped by calls for regulations to protect monopoly markets, buried in a morass of bureaucracies or financially shortchanged by the need to please Wall Street with quarterly results. The current dilemma over H-1B visas for foreign technology workers is a prime example of where innovation is needed but is sorely lacking.

I won't recap the long saga of the H-1B visa system, but Wikipedia does a decent job of describing the history and controversy. Vendors claim they need H-1B workers to fill technology jobs when the talent pool of U.S. citizens trained for a particular skill is too shallow. Technology workers claim that the H-1B program is a subsidized sham that screws (often older) U.S. workers by allowing companies to undercut the salary structure and that it keeps the U.S. technology work force from having a collective voice.

Each year, the period between when the H-1B visa application process opens and when the number of applicants far exceeds the number of visas that will be granted becomes shorter. This year, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency said it had received about 150,000 applications for 65,000 2008 visas in one day and would not review new petitions after April 3. Bills to increase the number of H-1B

visas are in various stages of legislation, but the issue seems destined to be delayed as the country's lawmakers debate larger immigration issues.

Meanwhile, the two sides in the debate appear as far apart as ever.

Bill Gates has been the most vocal proponent of dropping the H-1B requirements altogether. In recent testimony before Congress relating to H-1B visas, the Microsoft chairman was quoted by The Washington Post as saying, "Even though it may not be realistic, I don't think there should be any limit." Columnist John Dvorak does a good job of summarizing the firestorm Gates' comment touched off in a blog post titled "Microsoft to American Coders: If You Are Out of Work, then You Obviously Suck!"

So Gates wants an open-door policy for technology workers. Dvorak et al. see an open door for foreign workers as a closed door for Americans hoping to earn a living wage at technology factories.

What's missing is some innovation in balancing the two needs. You might think that I, as the son of immigrant parents, support unfettered access to the U.S. economy, but I don't. I'm more in the "I'll give you unfettered access to our house if you apply the same rules to your house" camp. The call by technology executives to continually increase funding of the sciences (the standard innovation called for by tech execs) in the lower grades at the expense of the humanities strikes me as particularly shortsighted.

What's my suggestion regarding H-1B? How about taking a look at the green movement, where carbon-neutral offsets have become the innovation that promises to fund all those alternative-energy projects that seem so encouraging? What if each company that hires an H-1B worker also promises to fund either the education of a promising U.S. high school student or retrain and pay an older technology worker?

Companies would get as many H-1B workers as they like, and their calls for innovation in education and retraining would have to be backed up by real dollars invested in specific workers for the U.S. technology work force.

There may be lots of reasons (many of them financial) why immigrant-neutral will never get past this column, but I haven't heard any other, better ideas so far on the H-1B dilemma.

*By Eric Lundquist*

*Copyright 2007 by Ziff Davis Media, Distributed by United Press International*

Citation: H-1B Answer: Innovation (2007, April 13) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-04-h-1b.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.