



April 1 shows the high-skilled visa crisis must be addressed

By Scott Corley
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Today, highly skilled immigration reform ceases to be a policy debate and becomes a problem of simple math.

That's because today is April 1, and like so many other April 1's for the past quarter century, our immigration system will once again limit our nation's opportunities for economic expansion and job growth. Highly skilled immigrants to America not only keep our fastest growing export industries competitive, they help keep and create jobs for Americans. In spite of the clear benefits they bring, our nation caps the availability of these job creators at 85,000 a year--well short of the U.S. market demand for qualified highly skilled workers. In fact, each year tens of thousands of applications for H-1B Visas are received, and yet the caps are met so fast that the process is closed in just days. In other words, less than a week for now, America's most innovative businesses will no longer be able to hire the talent they need to grow their companies this year.

Who could oppose innovative job creators, many trained in our best universities, working and living in America? So much of the opposition to H-1B visas is based on fiction. In the light of truth, the picture of the H-1Bs clearly demonstrates a program where the tremendous benefits to our economy far outweigh the infrequent iniquities.

To begin with, it's a fact that the presence of highly skilled foreign professionals in our country creates economic growth and job opportunities for Americans. Last year, Compete America, the coalition of high-tech firms and universities that supports increasing highly skilled immigration, released research showing that each highly skilled immigrant who comes to the U.S. creates an additional four jobs for US workers.

To demonstrate visually how damaging this crisis is to our economy, the "Jobs Lost Calculator" was launched to keep track of all the jobs lost since 2013 due to the H-1B visa crisis. In real time, the calculator keeps track of not only the 100,000 scientists and engineers who won't get a visa but also the additional four jobs each one of them would likely create. As a result, the "Jobs Lost Calculator," launched last year with a starting point of 500,000 jobs lost in 2013, has now reached the one million number. That's one million jobs lost in just two years right here in America because of Congress's failure to update our highly skilled immigration system.

It's time for Congress to take action and fix this problem. And in so doing, Congress needs to speak to the facts. Like the fact that stopping highly skilled immigration doesn't help American workers, it hurts them. Empirical research clearly demonstrates that lowering the number of highly skilled immigrants would not create more jobs for American workers. Indeed, just the opposite is true. Economists using the U.S. Applied General Equilibrium (USAGE) modeling have concluded that more immigration creates more jobs for Americans. The Cato Institute found that increases in immigration, over time, help workers in low-paying jobs to move up the economic ladder.

And then there is the fact that immigrant STEM workers are filling jobs that would otherwise not be filled. Studies have shown that there are simply more U.S. STEM jobs than can be filled by domestic workers. A study by a non-partisan education advocacy organization called "Change the Equation" found that from 2009 to 2011, 1.91 STEM jobs were posted online for every one unemployed STEM worker. Leaving these jobs unfilled serves no purpose. It is far better for our economy and our American workforce to fill shortages in the U.S. with immigrant STEM workers rather than having these shortages met by offshore competitors. Regardless of the nature of the job, we know that by keeping as many jobs as possible at home, we create economic growth to the benefit of our country. All in all, domestic workers still account for more than 90 percent of all jobs in America.

And, of course, there is the fact that highly skilled immigrants create upward pressure on wages which benefits everyone. Data shows that wages are increasing for U.S. workers where highly skilled immigrants are employed in STEM jobs requiring higher education. As the General Accountability Office concluded in 2014, "STEM occupations saw more wage growth on average and lower unemployment rates than non-STEM occupations." Given the critical role highly skilled foreign professionals play in the highly skilled U.S. workforce, it's clear that American workers benefit from highly skilled immigration, as wages continue to rise relative to other U.S. professions over time in fields like computer programming and software engineering.

It's time to face the facts and it's time to address the jobs crisis and pass highly skilled immigration reform now.