

Plan to add visas for high-tech and skilled workers dropped

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Body

A Senate-passed measure to **add** more **visas** for foreign **workers** in **high-tech** and specialty fields was **dropped** from a budget bill that passed the House early Monday, disappointing **high-tech** and manufacturing firms in search of **skilled workers**.

The Senate **plan** would have allowed 30,000 more of the popular H1-B **visas** each year, and increased fees for those **visas** to help trim the budget deficit. Congress capped the six-year H-1B **visas** at 65,000 per year in 2004, and that cap has already been reached for the 2006 fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

The Senate language also would have allowed 90,000 more employment-based green cards that offer permanent residency to **skilled workers**, and **added** fees for those.

Critics contend the **visas** give foreigners high-level jobs that should go to American **workers**, and the **plan** was opposed by some House Republicans as a backdoor way to boost immigration. House and Senate negotiators left it out of the final version of a \$39.7 billion federal budget bill that passed the House 212-206 and was expected to get a Senate vote later in the day.

"This is very, very disappointing," said Sandy Boyd, a vice president at the National Association of Manufacturers. "What's distressing about this, and what the Senate clearly understood, is there is a real global competition for this work and for these employees, and the question is not whether the work is going to get done, it's where is the work going to get done. We've missed a real opportunity by not ensuring the work would be done here."

House and Senate negotiators also **dropped** a **plan** to increase fees on another kind of **visa**, the L-1, which companies use to transfer **workers** they already employ in foreign countries to the United States.

The boost to **visa** availability and fees was meant to achieve budget savings in programs under jurisdiction of the congressional judiciary committees. Instead of using **visas**, the final version of the bill saves money in judiciary programs by increasing fees for filing lawsuits and filing for bankruptcy.

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