

**Open: Jobs for Specialists;**  
**Wanted: Foreign Workers;**  
**Labor Dept. Proposes 'Green Card' Shortcut**

The Washington Post  
May 7, 1993, Friday, Final Edition

Copyright 1993 The Washington Post

**Section:** FIRST SECTION; PAGE A21; THE FEDERAL PAGE; NATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 912 words

**Byline:** Boyce Rensberger, Washington Post Staff Writer

**Series:** Occasional

## **Body**

---

At a time when shrinking federal science dollars and spreading layoffs in high-tech industries are putting American scientists and engineers out of work, the **Labor** Department is trying to make it easier for employers to hire foreigners.

The department's plan is to declare shortages of scientists and engineers in various fields in certain states. Employers in those places then would no longer need to advertise openings to Americans -- even though some states may have surpluses -- before giving the **job** to a **foreign** scientist or engineer.

According to **proposed** rules published in the March 19 Federal Register, the **Labor** Department would automatically certify aliens for permanent residence in the United States if they were qualified for certain **jobs** in official shortage states. The **proposed** system would **shortcut** the current process whereby employers who wish to hire foreigners first must prove that they could not find a qualified American. Certification is a necessary step before foreigners can get "**green cards**" that allow a them to reside here permanently.

If the department's **proposal** survives the comment period, which will end June 1, it would declare that there are shortages of chemists in six states, chemical engineers in three states, computer scientists in seven states, and biologists in 17 states, including Maryland, home of the National Institutes of Health, the nation's largest employer of biomedical scientists. The department believes there are also shortages of materials engineers in four states and mechanical engineers in two states.

The **proposal** has baffled and outraged leaders in several scientific and engineering fields.

"I don't think there are shortages of anybody right now, aside from a few esoteric superspecialties," said Betty Vetter, head of the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology, who opposes the **proposal**. "The timing of this thing absolutely blows the mind."

Vetter's group, which collects data on the supply of and demand for scientists in all fields, is sponsored by 27 scientific societies, including all the specialties in which the **Labor** Department study contends there are shortages.

"Shortage? I certainly don't see any shortage in biomedical science," said Robert D. Goldman, chairman of the department of cellular, molecular and structural biology at Northwestern University's medical school. "When we

Open: Jobs for Specialists;Wanted: Foreign Workers;Labor Dept. Proposes 'Green Card' Shortcut

advertise for an assistant professor or something comparable, we regularly get over 500 applications from all over the country. That doesn't look like a shortage to me."

Goldman, who is an officer of the American Society for Cell Biology, one of the country's largest associations of biomedical researchers, said the supply of federal grant money for training and research has tightened so much in recent years and job opportunities have dwindled so much that many young people are quitting science for other fields.

Even young biomedical scientists who stay in the field, Vetter said, must usually be content with a series of temporary jobs that pay the least of any field requiring a doctorate. Starting salaries for PhDs in biology typically are in the low \$ 30,000s.

"If there really were a shortage of biomedical PhDs," Vetter said. "You would think they'd be offering a lot more."

Martin Siegel of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers said there were so few jobs in his field that only two-thirds of the chemical engineers who will graduate this year have been offered jobs. Normally, he said, they all have positions by the time they leave school.

Individual scientists also have spoken out against the proposal.

"I wish to express my vehement objections to these completely specious conclusions," John G. Van Alsten wrote the Labor Department. A chemist with E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Van Alsten said many of his colleagues are having trouble finding jobs. He said he had talked with placement officers at three major universities and all expressed incredulity that anyone could think there were shortages of scientists and engineers.

Rep. Collin C. Peterson (D-Minn.), chairman of the Government Operations subcommittee on employment, housing and aviation, thinks high-tech jobs should be kept open for Americans.

"It's inexplicable that Labor would view a possible shortage of, say, mechanical engineers in Pennsylvania as a reason for opening the doors to foreigners instead of expanding recruitment here at home," he said.

Pat Stange of the Labor Department's Division of Foreign Labor Certification, which made the proposal, said the ruling is not final.

The determination of shortages was made by Malcolm S. Cohen of the University of Michigan's Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations under a \$ 50,000 contract with the Labor Department. Cohen said he relied on statistics such as the unemployment rates for each profession, the growth or decline in wages and the number of foreigners certified by the department using the procedure.

"In no case did I find there was an overall shortage throughout the country," Cohen said. "The shortage indications are confined to specific states."

Cohen also said he does not consider his findings conclusive. He noted that since he completed his study, several major employers of scientists and engineers have laid off large numbers of professionals. Also, he said, "I didn't actually talk to any employers or employee groups. That's what I'm hoping the comment period will bring out."

## Graphic

---

ILLUSTRATION, NOT ENOUGH AMERICANS? TWP

## Classification

---

Open: Jobs for Specialists;Wanted: Foreign Workers;Labor Dept. Proposes 'Green Card' Shortcut

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** TECHNICIANS & TECHNOLOGICAL WORKERS (91%); LABOR SHORTAGES (90%); SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (90%); ENGINEERING (90%); FOREIGN LABOR (90%); RECRUITMENT & HIRING (90%); BIOLOGY (89%); LABOR DEPARTMENTS (89%); BIOMEDICINE (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); RESEARCH INSTITUTES (78%); MEDICAL RESEARCH (78%); MATERIALS SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (78%); CHEMICAL ENGINEERING (78%); CHEMISTRY (78%); EMPLOYMENT OPENINGS (78%); SHORTAGES (77%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (77%); EMPLOYMENT SEARCH (77%); COMMODITIES SHORTAGES (77%); AGENCY RULEMAKING (77%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (77%); TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT (73%); MECHANICAL ENGINEERING (73%); COMPUTER SCIENCE (73%); LAYOFFS (73%); MOLECULAR BIOLOGY (70%); GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS (60%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%); GRANTS & GIFTS (60%)

**Company:** SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY EQUIPMENT LLC (53%); LABOR DEPARTMENT LABOR DEPARTMENT (79%); NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (51%)

**Organization:** NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (54%); NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (54%); LABOR DEPARTMENT LABOR DEPARTMENT (79%); NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (51%)

**Industry:** ENGINEERING (90%); CHEMICAL ENGINEERING (78%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (77%); MECHANICAL ENGINEERING (73%); COMPUTER SCIENCE (73%); GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS (60%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%)

**Geographic:** MARYLAND, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

**Load-Date:** October 14, 1993