

## **Gates: More skilled labor from abroad needed in U.S.**

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### **Body**

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Washington --- Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates told Congress on Wednesday that the United States should welcome an "infinite" number of high-skilled foreign workers to fill engineering, computer programming and other jobs that otherwise would be vacant.

Employers face a "critical shortage" of high-tech workers, Gates said. "There is only one way to solve that crisis today: open our doors to highly talented scientists and engineers who want to live, work and pay taxes here."

Gates told the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee that Congress should fix the "terrible shortfall" in H-1B visas, which allow well-educated foreigners to work in the U.S. for several years.

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who invited Gates' advice on improving U.S. competitiveness, agreed that "the U.S. cannot sit back and watch other countries attract the best talent." Kennedy is working with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) on an immigration reform package that may include more H-1B visas.

The government currently issues 65,000 H-1B visas each year. The visas are quickly snapped up, typically by tech workers from China and India. The cap had been as high as 195,000 in the past, but was allowed to recede in the aftermath of the 2001 recession.

Gates said even a return to the previous high level of visas would be inadequate because of the growing demand for workers with backgrounds in math, science and engineering. "The country should welcome as many as possible," he said.

Many U.S. engineers and immigration opponents hope to thwart more visas, saying companies use foreign workers to drive down U.S. wages.

Kim Berry, a computer programmer in Sacramento, Calif., and president of the Programmers Guild, said his group opposes creation of more visas because they already "are pushing Americans out of the market."

Employers are so eager to get access to lower-wage workers that "they don't first consider qualified Americans," Berry said.

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**More** young Americans would be drawn to such work if the pay were better, he said. "That's the way supply and demand are supposed to work," he said. "You boost the salary" and **more U.S.** students would study engineering and programming.

Berry said House members are **more** likely to try to block the Senate from raising the H-1B visa cap. "Members of the House are **more** down to earth," compared with the Senate, where many are millionaires and may not know average workers, he said.

**Gates** faced no harsh challenges from the committee. Even Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) said that in his state, with high unemployment, business owners have told him "they just could not find the engineers or computer scientists they **needed**."

Kennedy did, however, ask **Gates** whether allowing **more** health professionals into the **U.S.** might cause a "brain drain" in poorer countries. **Gates** said that keeping such professionals out of the **U.S.** is no solution because "they just go to other countries" with high living standards.

**Gates** also called for improving high school education and doubling college graduates in math and science by 2015. He urged lawmakers to boost spending on basic scientific research.

## Graphic

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Photo: Microsoft's Bill **Gates** says Congress should OK **more** H-1B visas./ImageData\*

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