

Mr. Speaker, expanding the number of H-1B visas for foreign workers is critical to the well being of Oregon's high-tech community. Given the strong economy, record low unemployment, and declining graduation rates in high-tech education fields, that industry is facing a critical shortage of highly educated workers. In Oregon, for example, we have openings for 800 software engineers and are currently unable to fill them.

Our education system is not producing the needed skilled workers for the high-tech industry. The H-1B visa program helps fill the void, but that's not all it does. The legislation we adopted last night helps develop our own workforce.

The bill keeps the current \$500 application fee that employers pay for new H-1B visa holders, which produces \$75 million in revenue each year. Less than two percent of the fees is for administrative expenses and the rest is used to enhance our educational system. This funding provides science, engineering, and technology post-secondary scholarships for low-income and disadvantaged students. It is also used to improve K-12 math and science education and for job training.

While this funding helps, I have joined many of my colleagues in pressing for more. I am a cosponsor of the Dreier-Lofgren bill that raises the cap on H-1B visas and doubles the application fee to \$1000. I am hopeful we can adopt that increase before we adjourn and thereby do even more to meet our nation's educational needs.

Many companies in my state are working independently of the government to help as well. Intel makes its micro-chips in Oregon. In 1998, it contributed \$63 million to higher education and \$29 million to K-12 education. In an effort to encourage high school students to enter science and engineering career field tracks, companies like Electro Scientific Industries have partnered with local school districts and opened their doors to students, teachers and parents to talk to young engineers about career decisions and options.

Together, we can reverse the shortage by improving our educational system. In the short term, increasing visa numbers is not a bad thing. Each new wave of immigrants adds to the diversity and character of our communities. This diversity has given us the strength to grow in times of prosperity and survive in times of trouble. H-1B visa holders add to our strong economy.

Expand the Number of H-1B Visas

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