Congressional Chicanery about H-lB Visas

by Phyllis Schlajly *December 7, 2005*

"Why is it taking you five years to get through college?" I asked a student attending one of my campus lectures. "Because I changed my major from computer science to accounting after I discovered there are almost no jobs available for computer majors."

Of course there are plenty computer jobs, but not for Americans because big business would rather hire foreigners. It's all a matter of money; corporations use their financial clout to get Congress to import foreigners who will work for half the salary Americans used to be paid for computer work.

It's called the H-lB racket, and it's very profitable for the big corporations. This system is not the free market; it's politicians and corporations conniving to do an end run around our immigration laws in order to keep wages artificially low.

The latest piece of chicanery is buried in the 817-page Deficit Reduction Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 2005 (S.1932) now going through Congress. Without any hearings, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) got the Judiciary Committee to insert language that will raise the annual cap on H-lB visas from the current 65,000 to 95,000, reissue unused immigrant work visas or green cards up to a maximum of90,000, and exempt the H-lBers' family members from the cap on employment-based immigration.

This is estimated to increase permanent immigration into the United States by more than 350,000 aliens a year. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) tried to protect American jobs by deleting Specter's amendment, but the Senate rejected Byrd's motion on November 3.

This latest attack on U.S. workers comes on the heels of another back-room deal last fall. Congress exempted from the annual H-lB visa cap 20,000 foreign students who get master's or Ph.D. degrees from U.S. universities.

Then, because of what was claimed to be a mistake, the Homeland Security Department approved 10,000 more visa applications for high-tech and specialty workers than Congress authorized. Nobody was fired over the mistake, and only Sen Charles Grassley (R IA) lamented, "It discourages me to hear that Congress' limit may have been ignored."

The rationale for inviting H-1B foreigners to take American jobs is an alleged labor shortage, but we never had any shortage in computer technicians, and employers are not required to look for Americans anyway. The labor-shortage claim is ridiculous today since there are more than 100,000 unemployed high-tech American workers, and some estimate the figure at 200,000.

In addition, there are several hundred thousand who are underemployed or working lesser jobs outside of their field. After the dot-com bust a few years ago, tens of thousands of computer workers and engineers left Silicon Valley and took any job they could get, of course at a fraction the pay they had been receiving.

At the same time, at least 463,000 H-lB workers are employed in the United States, and some estimate twice that number. H-1Bers who are hired by universities and other "exempt" institutions are not in the count. During the third quarter of last year, high tech companies in the U.S. laid off workers in record numbers, but they didn't lay offH-lB workers.

The best research on the economics of H-1B workers has been done by Professor Norman Matloff of the University of California/Davis. See www.eagleforum.org/links/

Business executives continue the pretense that American IT workers aren't available. In a speech to the National Governors Association on February 26, Bill Gates taunted us that India and China "have six times as many graduates majoring in engineering" as the United States.

The reason for this is obvious to bright college students who have discovered that Bill Gates prefers to hire foreign computer graduates. Microsoft is adding 4,400 employees this year, but more than half of that employment growth is outside the United States.

Microsoft has opened a research center in Bangalore, India where it expects to hire thousands of computer science graduates of universities in India at a fraction the cost of U.S. university graduates.

Microsoft is also on track to outsource more than 1,000 jobs a year to China. According to a former vice president, Microsoft promised China in 2003 that it would step up the level of its outsourcing to China from $33 million to $55 million worth a year, and China is complaining that the pace isn't fast enough.

It's bad news for America's future if the corporations learn to rely on foreigners for all their computer work. Americans, not foreigners, are the source of the technical innovations we need to stay ahead in the fast-moving computer industry. Of the 56 awards given by the Association for Computing Machinery for software and hardware innovation, only one recipient is an immigrant.

We are told that Congress is working on immigration reform and border security. Instead, Congress is selling out American workers to please their corporate contributors.