# American Innovation Supremacy at Risk

by Phyllis Schlafly July 2, 2008

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The high-priced corporate lobbyists walking Capitol Hill corridors have a new mantra: innovation. They demand that Congress bring in more guest workers, especially from Asia, in order to maintain American innovation supremacy.

The lobbyists' backup buzzword is "the best and the brightest." They argue that U.S. workers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are in short supply and we must now import foreign engineers and scientists, i.e., allow the multinationals to bring in an increased or even unlimited number of H-1B visas.

Their argument lacks evidence: Economics 101 teaches that shortages in labor or goods produce higher wages or higher prices. In fact, we have no shortage of engineers or computer techies, so their wages are stagnant and are certainly not going up.

In 2005, we graduated 271,000 students with bachelors or master's degrees in science and engineering who were citizens or legal residents. The dean of Duke University Engineering School says that 40 percent of his graduates do not get engineering jobs.

Bill Gates and other multinationals simply prefer to hire Asians, particularly from India, who work for low wages and can be trained on the job.

Professor Norman Matloff examined the H-1B record and discovered that H-1B visa recipients are mostly employees of ordinary talent doing ordinary work. Most of them work at Levels I and II, described by the Department of Labor in terms akin to apprenticeship, while very few H-1B workers are at Level IV, the level of expertise whose description is associated with innovation.

"Aliens of extraordinary ability" and outstanding professors and researchers can come into our country in another category, EB-1, and we welcome them. Another argument used by the lobbyists is that international comparisons of math and science K-12 test scores show that Americans are weak. That cannot be used as evidence because India and China refuse to participate in those tests.

Professor Matloff dispels the myth that our tech industry owes its success to math geniuses coming from Asia. The evidence does not support this "Asian mystique."

The Department of Homeland Security is doing its part to help the multinationals hire foreign graduates of U.S. universities instead of Americans by increasing the time foreign students can join the U.S. labor pool without an H-1B visa from 12 months to 29 months.

On a Friday afternoon, DHS quietly announced a new regulation that figuratively staples an H-1B visa to the diploma of all foreign graduates in science, technology, engineering or math. This bureaucratic edict really increases the H-1B cap by 23,000, which is the number of foreign students getting degrees in science, math and engineering this year.

Foreigners can remain in the United States for up to six years on an H-1B visa. That's plenty of time to have an anchor baby and stay forever, and there is no accounting of those who leave when their visa time is up.

The H-1B program was originally set up to help U.S. companies by allowing them to bring in specially qualified foreigners to fill jobs for which no American can be found. But six of the top 10 H-1B visa recipients in 2007 are based in India, and two others headquartered in the U.S. have most of their operations in India.

This year's keynote session of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, & Petroleum Engineers revealed how U.S. supremacy in technology is under attack in even more devious ways. A panel of speakers described the future role of U.S. engineers in the 21st century.

One speaker proclaimed that "pure engineering tasks" will all be outsourced, that our engineers must realize they are "citizens of the world," and that we must abandon "the engineer of the past, with a slide rule hanging from his belt," and change into a "personable manager with an engineering background" who will create personal relations with "external" clients.

A second speaker predicted that "engineering jobs will develop overseas and stay there since the technical resources will be there and the infrastructure will follow." A third speaker said that an engineer must "be prepared to jump from one place to another" because it's "risky for engineers to be focused on a very narrow aspect of any specific job."

A fourth speaker said that our challenge is "not so much the technical engineering but the socio-political engineering." A fifth speaker said, "the quality and quantity of R&D going overseas is increasing faster than it is here in the United States."

We wonder if there is any longer a purpose in American students taking the scholarly road of engineering school. To paraphrase a once-popular TV ad, "where's the innovation?"

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