

SURGE IN SKILLED-WORKER VISAS AFFIRM ECONOMIC RECOVERY



The authorities saw a huge surge in petitions for skilled-foreign-worker visas on the first week of this season of applications. Since April 2, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have received 25,600 H-1B visa applications, which is twice the number received last year for the same time period. The agency started the process of receiving H-1B applications from last week for jobs scheduled to commence from October 1 or later. The number of applications shows a vote of confidence in the economic recovery and end of the recession. Stuart Anderson, executive director of the National Foundation for American Policy, an Arlington-based group that studies the H-1 program told the media, "Given the improved economy ... it would not be surprising to see the quota filled very early this year." Each year, a maximum of 65,000 visas are granted for the general category of skilled workers who come under the purview of H-1B applications and an additional 20,000 H-1B visas are meant for foreign nationals with advanced degrees. The immigration agency reported last week that already 17,400 petitions in the general category and 8,200 petitions in the advanced category have been filed. The advanced category is for individuals who usually hold a minimum of a Master's degree. For the same period last year, there were only 5,900 H-1B applications in the general category and about 4,500 applications in the advanced category. Throughout April 2011, there were only about 14,000 petitions in total for the entire month, while close to twice that number has been reached in H1-B applications only during one week, this year. The demand for H1-B visas radically decreased during the period when the economy was into deep recession. While some law makers have expressed recently that the visa program allows foreign workers to displace qualified Americans, others maintain that induction of skilled workers from foreign soil boosts related economic activity and opens the workforce to greater acquisition of skills. Immigration attorneys are happy. A Seattle attorney told the media, "We're the busiest we have been in four years ... We're seeing a widespread increase in hiring of new employees." He held that the market was showing greater competition for top talent.

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