

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## HIGH-TECH BUSINESSES PRESSURE HOUSE LAWMAKERS

By Jonathan House  
June 29, 2013

Businesses starved for high-skilled talent are already pressing their lawmakers as the debate over new immigration legislation shifts from the Senate to the House.

The bill approved Thursday by the upper chamber would open the doors much wider to high-skilled foreign workers. It nearly doubles the cap on so-called H-1B visas to 110,000, allows for the cap to be raised in instances of extraordinary demand and lifts limits entirely for some skill sets.

Employer demand this year for skilled-worker visas, known as H-1Bs, outstripped the entire year's supply in the first week that companies were allowed to file applications, prompting the government to resort to a lottery to award them.

Technology giants including Microsoft, Intel and Facebook FB -0.28% are lobbying hard to gain easier access to foreign workers. Some Silicon Valley investors have even announced a plan to build a floating corporate park in international waters off the California coast where foreign entrepreneurs could set up shop.

Though leading members of the House of Representatives have expressed skepticism toward the Senate's proposal to legalize an estimated 11 million undocumented workers, they have been more agreeable towards measures to help businesses. On Thursday, the House Judiciary Committee passed a proposal of its own to make it easier for technology companies to tap foreign labor pools.

The issue draws supporters from both sides of the aisle. But one challenge of the push for high-skilled workers is that Democrats are loath to back piecemeal measures without getting something in return – such as a path to legalization for undocumented workers.

Myriad business groups are now coming forward with proposals to address the specific needs of their industries or regions. A coalition of chambers of commerce from the Great Lakes area, for example, is discussing with lawmakers from its region an idea to create "high-skilled immigration zones" where caps on visas for engineers and other high-skilled workers would be waived entirely. It's part of an effort to reverse the long decline of local manufacturing industries.

"There's a sense among employers in the metropolitan areas that the difficulties that the region has had over the last 10 years have resulted in a loss of jobs that we've had to overcome [and] an out-migration of people to other parts of the country," said Ed Wolking, executive vice president for the Detroit Regional Chamber.