

# Alberta, Canada Welcomes H-1B Visa Holders and Their Families While the U.S. Rejects them

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17/07/08

AL DIA (Philadelphia):

This time the U.S. government has really missed the boat. No, I'm not talking about our failed policy in Iraq, the gas crisis, the mortgage crisis made even worse by fact that Freddie and Fannie Mae need a federal bailout when the federal government doesn't have any money because we're operating under major deficit spending or the fact that most Americans feel hopeless and helpless as America is losing its economic power worldwide and the average American is struggling to survive. Instead, I'm talking about how our country, in desperate need of highly skilled foreign professionals, many of whom were educated here, has chosen to reject them rather than raise the immigrant quotas to correspond with market need. Our neighbor, Alberta, Canada, is correctly seeking to capitalize on this pool of talented professionals who have had it with the U.S. immigration system—with quotas that create waiting lists that seem to span a lifetime.

Witness the advertisements that appeared last week in our local newspapers as well as in other major newspapers throughout the U.S. They began as follows:

Alberta, Canada Welcomes H-1B Visa Holders and Their Families. Work Here. Live Here.

Are you currently working in the United States in a temporary skilled worker visa category?

You may be eligible to qualify for Canadian Permanent Residency through the Strategic Recruitment Stream pilot program recently introduced by the Alberta Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

To qualify for this pilot program, you must meet the following basic criteria:

1. You must be currently working in the United States in one of the following temporary skilled worker visa categories: H-1B, H1-B1, H-1C, E-3
2. You must have a minimum of one year of work experience in the United States in one of the qualifying visa categories listed above.
3. Your occupation must be on the Regional Occupations Under Pressure list for Alberta.

Why would U.S. H-1B holders seek to “defect” to our northern neighbor and why would Alberta, Canada seek to do this? You only have to look at the current waiting lists for these skilled professionals under the employment based categories of EB2 and EB3 to have your answer: H-1B immigrants, especially those from India and China, can wait up to 6 years for a “green card” and the security that it brings. After a while, these prospective immigrants and H-1B holders start to grow weary of the temporary nature of their status and sometimes are just ready to throw in the towel. However, many don’t want to go home for a variety of reasons. The U.S., rather than raising quotas, has firmly stuck to an annual 140,000 visas for employment immigrants. That quota includes their family members and hence makes many fewer than 140,000 visas available each year for employment based foreign nationals seeking to immigrate to the U.S.

Enter Canada and go backwards in time to several years ago, when Hong Kong was about to revert to China. Vancouver, Canada decided that there were many Hong Kong professionals with great financial resources who would be thrilled at a chance to immigrate to Canada. Vancouver offered the equivalent of “green cards”—“landed immigrant status” to these individuals and as a result they pumped billions of dollars into the Vancouver economy.

Fast forward to 2008 and enter Alberta, hoping to capitalize on the great professional skills and business creation potential the poorly treated U.S H-1B workers represent. Can you blame them? Absolutely not. Can you blame the U.S. for allowing these critical professionals to defect? Absolutely. Ask yourself: Would you choose to live in long term insecurity in the U.S. if you had another option? Probably not.

Given Alberta’s aggressive recruitment of “our” H-1B workers, expect to see a mass defection---until and unless U.S. Immigration laws open up quotas for much-needed professionals. If ever there were a wake-up call for our Congress, embroiled in election politics, that immigration reform should and must be a priority, this is it.