

Gates Tells Congress What Is Needed for Better Work Force

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By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — More investment in math and science education and a more liberal policy toward skilled foreign workers are crucial if America is to avoid losing its competitive edge, a founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, told Congress on Wednesday.

The shortage of scientists and engineers is so acute, Mr. Gates said, that “we must do both: reform our education system and our immigration policies.”

“If we don’t, American companies simply will not have the talent to innovate and compete,” he said in testimony to the House Committee on Science and Technology.

Mr. Gates outlined four goals he said the country must pursue: improving educational opportunities in science and technology, revamping the visa system for highly skilled workers, increasing federal financing for basic scientific research and providing incentives for private-sector research and development.

The toughest sell was the position of Mr. Gates, and others in high-tech industries, that Congress raise the current cap of 65,000 H-1B visas, nonimmigrant visas that allow employers to hire foreigners with specific skills. The program allows 20,000 visas for foreigners receiving master’s or doctoral degrees from American universities.

Current limits, he said, have led to a “serious disruption” in the flow of science, technology, and engineering graduates to American companies. Mr. Gates said companies had been forced to put employees in countries more open to foreign workers.