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Another key Republican calls for H-1B cap hike

Meanwhile, President Obama holds meeting on immigration reform

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WASHINGTON -- There has been no rush by employers for H-1B visas since the recession began, but there is an increasing rhetorical push in the U.S. House to raise the visa cap.

At a special hearing by the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in San Jose Monday on high-tech growth policies, its chairman, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), called for a liberalization of the H-1B cap.

Issa said that "there seems little doubt that federal policies and regulations have played a large role in hampering growth." Among other things, he cited the H-1B visa cap in his prepared remarks.

"Five years ago, Bill Gates and many others warned of the negative impact of strict caps on H-1B visas for technology workers on U.S. technology companies, with a commensurate positive effect on the high-tech industries in other countries, like China and India," said Issa.

Late last month, U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, also called for [an H-1B cap increase](#).

Smith warned that if Congress doesn't approve an increase in H-1B visas, he might seek restrictions on who is eligible for them. He said he could make fashion models, for instance, ineligible in order to make more H-1B visas available to computer scientists.

But neither Issa, Smith nor any member of Congress was at a meeting that President Barack Obama held on Tuesday to discuss immigration reform. Among the approximately 30 people who attended were New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Arnold Schwarzenegger, the former governor of California.

The only person from a high-tech firm at the gathering was Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer.

Obama has [not outlined specifics](#) of how an immigration reform plan would affect the high-tech industry, other than to cite a general need for retaining graduates of U.S. colleges and universities.


There has been support on both sides of the congressional aisle for raising the H-1B cap.

But some lawmakers may be favoring green card reform instead of a cap increase.

U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.), whose district includes Silicon Valley, has been [working on a bill](#) that would make it easier for foreign advanced-degree graduates of U.S. universities to get a green card, but that bill has not been introduced.

The U.S. issues 85,000 H-1B visas annually, with 20,000 set aside for advanced-degree holders. It begins accepting petitions for visas each April 1.

In the years immediately prior to the recession, there was so much demand for H-1Bs that the cap was reached within the first month the visas were available.

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