

Rubio: Immigration Reform Can Keep Tech Jobs in U.S.

[JORDAN FABIAN](#) (@Jordanfabian)

Jan. 23, 2013

Keeping high tech jobs in the United States is a primary reason to pass immigration reform, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) said on Wednesday.

Rubio told a gathering of educators at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., that high-tech companies estimate they cannot fill tens of thousands of jobs in the U.S. in part because of an immigration system that does not provide enough visas for foreigners who earn advanced degrees here and want to remain to work. As a result, those jobs are being filled overseas, Rubio said.

"In some instances, this is no joke, we are graduating kids with these degrees and these skill sets. We are then forcing them to leave the country and the jobs are following them over there," he said. "This is crazy."

Rubio later added: "That obviously speaks to the need for immigration reform."

Lawmakers in both political parties have long agreed on the need to expand the number of visas for those in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. But Congress has been unable to agree on a [means](#) to [do so](#). STEM visas, however, are expected to be a part of a broader immigration reform effort in Congress this year.

Rubio, one of three Cuban-Americans in the Senate, has begun to float his own immigration plan, which would increase the amount of visas available to highly skilled graduates and professionals. That wouldn't necessarily come at the expense of reducing the amount of visas in other areas, he recently told The Wall Street Journal.

"I don't think there's a lot of concern in this country that we'll somehow get overrun by Ph.D.s and entrepreneurs," Rubio said in an interview with the paper.

The GOP-controlled House recently passed a bill that would have granted 55,000 new STEM visas, but the effort was opposed by Democrats and did not advance in the Senate because it took visas away from the [so-called "diversity lottery"](#) that grants visas to people from countries underrepresented in the U.S. immigration system.

High-tech visas are one of the least controversial elements of comprehensive immigration legislation, but it's an area that has been critical in getting [business groups on board](#) with a reform push.

The U.S. Chamber, where Rubio spoke, has voiced support for legalizing undocumented immigrants and expanding the number of visas for highly-skilled workers as part of immigration reform. [Lobbyists from the tech industry](#) have joined business groups in calling for expanding STEM visas.

Rubio did not reference DREAMers, undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. at a young age who are seeking higher education, in his remarks. But his immigration outline includes a way to naturalize them "in a more expedited manner than the rest of the population," he told the Wall Street Journal.

Rubio said that immigration reform is only one way for the U.S. to staff up its high tech firms. The other problem, he said, is that there isn't enough skilled laborers among the American population. To address that, Rubio called on education reforms that include extending federal student aid to online courses and other non-traditional educational institutions.

"It speaks even more to the need to produce those workers" in the United States, Rubio said. "That skills gap is a real threat to our future."

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