

Tech Industry's Stance on Immigration Scrutinized

- By [Laura Meckler](#)

WASHINGTON—The technology industry's push for legislation providing more visas for high-tech foreign workers is prompting concern that the influential technology lobby may be stepping back from the broader effort to pass comprehensive legislation.

The chief lobbyist for **Compete America**, which represents large technology companies, says his group remains fully committed to the wider effort. But the back-and-forth, which became public this week, reflects underlying uneasiness among supporters of an immigration overhaul, who have grown deeply frustrated by the House's inaction on the issue.

As the broader legislation has faltered, some fear that smaller, less controversial pieces of the issue—such as visas for high-tech or agriculture workers—will clear Congress, undermining the push for other, tougher aspects—such as a path to citizenship for the 11 million people in the country illegally.

The recent controversy was sparked by an [opinion piece](#) by **Scott Corley**, the executive director of Compete America. In it, he makes the economic case for more visas and concludes: "Congress needs to act now. The House of Representatives should take up legislation like the bipartisan SKILLS Act today and increase the number of H-1B Visas available." He did not mention the broader immigration overhaul.

The group made a similar push for a visa bill in a teleconference. And other immigration supporters concluded that Compete America was asking House members to move a bill addressing their concerns by itself if the broader legislation does not advance.

This week, Sen. **Dick Durbin** (D., Ill.), an architect of the sweeping immigration bill that passed the Senate last summer, wrote to the CEOs of major tech companies on Tuesday to complain. He asked them to renew their commitment to a comprehensive bill and to pledge that they will not support stand-alone legislation to increase the number of high-tech visas, known as H1-Bs.

"I am troubled by recent statements suggesting that some in the technology industry may shift their focus to passage of stand-alone legislation that would only resolve the industry's concerns," he wrote. "This 'divide and conquer' approach destroys the delicate political balance achieved in our bipartisan bill and calls into question the good faith of those who would sacrifice millions of lives for H-1B relief."

Mr. Corley said in an interview that his group knows that, as a political matter, its legislation cannot pass Congress or be signed by the president as a stand-alone bill. He said Compete America remains fully committed to the larger effort.

“In no one way are we abandoning comprehensive reform,” he said. Senate Democrats, he said, would never allow a high-tech bill to become law without companion legislation aiding undocumented immigrants. “What logic would we have in the House passing something that is dead on arrival in the Senate?”

He said his group’s goal is to spur momentum in the House on one aspect of the issue, which will hopefully lead to broader movement on the larger debate.

But the rumors that the tech industry is changing its strategy have impacted advocates for immigrants, who fear they will be sold out, said another lobbyist for high-tech.

“For people on the left, all this did was fuel suspicion that this was always the deal and tech doesn’t care about the undocumented,” this lobbyist said.

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