

US Chamber pushes for immigration reform to include boost in high-skilled visas

By Jennifer Martinez - 01/10/13 05:37 PM ET

The chief executive of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the powerful business lobby wants Congress to make more high-skilled visas available to immigrants as part of its push for comprehensive immigration reform.

Thomas Donohue, the head of the U.S. Chamber, said Thursday that immigration reform would drive economic growth and help the U.S. stay competitive with other countries. He said changes to the current system should include expanding the caps for high-skilled visas and boosting the number of green cards, where appropriate, for foreign-born graduates with master's degrees and Ph.D.s, among other initiatives.

"We are locked in a global competition for the world's best talent," Donohue said while delivering his annual address on the state of American business. "This is the competition that will separate the economic leaders from the laggards in the 21st century."

In his address, the Chamber chief also **discussed** the threat that the national debt poses to the U.S., as well as the business lobby's push to reform the tax code and its other agenda items for the year.

When speaking about immigration reform, Donohue noted that millions of jobs go unfilled each year despite high unemployment, and that sometimes companies take their businesses abroad in order to fill those positions.

Microsoft, in particular, **warned** earlier this year that tech companies are facing a shortage of qualified job applicants for engineering and research positions. The company unveiled a proposal this fall that would increase the number of visas for high-skilled foreign workers and inject millions of dollars in federal funding for education.

The Obama administration has made immigration reform a top policy priority this year, and Congress is expected to get to work on legislation in the early months of 2013.

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