WikiLeaks cables describe H-1B fraud attempts

Cables released by WikiLeaks add color and detail to long-held USCIS concerns about fraud in H1-B visa program

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WASHINGTON -- The cables being released by WikiLeaks are shedding some light on fraud in the H-1B visa application process in countries that don't get much attention for it -- Mexico, Libya and Iceland.

The reports so far are a collection of anecdotes explaining attempts to dupe U.S. officials into granting visas to people not eligible for them. That collection may grow as more cables are released.

The cables offer insight into the types of issues that embassy officials in such countries can encounter when processing work visas.

A cable sent from the U.S. embassy in Mexico City, written two years ago this month, said that Mexico presents "persistent fraud problems" for the H-1B and L-1 visa programs as applicants "overstate experience, education, or future job responsibilities in efforts to bolster their applications."

The embassy also reported that "individuals may also set up shell companies as a means to live in the U.S."

The fraud attempts in Mexico are mostly by people looking for a way to immigrate to the U.S., according to the cable.

The most common false documents presented during interviews or in petition packages submitted to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officials are false pay receipts, the embassy wrote.

This cable, and others, shed a little detail on a 2008 USCIS report that found evidence of forged documents and shell companies that gave fake addresses and locations.

That report found one in five visas are affected by either fraud or have "technical violations."

For several months, WikiLeaks has been slowly releasing State Department cables that may ultimately number as many as 251,000. Less than 7,000 cables have been released so far.

In September 2009, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Libya, reported that "an H-1B applicant presented documents that were clearly fake and stated that he paid a large sum for them on-line. He believed this to be the process to obtain a work visa in the United States."

In Iceland, the embassy in Reykjavik reported that immigration attorneys were attempting to fly in H-1B and L-1 applicants "from other parts of the world for the sole purpose of having them apply for visas in Iceland in the expectation of fast and easy issuance."

In the cable, the embassy said it was discouraging attorneys from doing that.

At about the time the USCIS released its report on fraud in 2008, the agency began stepping up enforcement of the visa program. That effort continues today.

The enforcement efforts often come in the form of what's called requests for evidence (RFE), which could, for example, involve a request for the floor plans of an office building to verify whether a company that an applicant listed as an employer is real or not.

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