

THE PRESIDENT'S EXPORT COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

April 8, 2008

The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The President's Export Council (PEC) applauds your Administration's efforts to seek comprehensive immigration reform. As you noted in your recent State of the Union Address, we will never fully secure our border until we create a lawful way for foreign workers to come here and support our economy. This letter focuses on specific immigration policies that we believe are necessary to ensure U.S. competitiveness in the 21st Century.

It is undeniable that post 9-11 security measures have served to reduce the number of people visiting the United States from abroad, either for education, tourism or business purposes. The PEC acknowledges that enhanced border measures were needed to protect homeland security. It is incumbent upon us to continually assess these measures to ensure an appropriate balance. Specifically, we need to make certain that in protecting our national security, we do not unduly serve to harm our economic security and future.

The United States faces significant workforce shortages, particularly among highly-trained individuals in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (the so-called "STEM" group). As an example, China now graduates more than three times the number of engineers as the United States each year. This imbalance not only threatens U.S. competitiveness, but also the very innovation that drives the U.S. economy.

With this in mind, there are a number of steps that should be taken to make the entry process more flexible and welcoming to people engaged in sectors of critical importance to our economy, such as those trained in the STEM fields. High-skilled graduates and individuals with a background in the STEM disciplines are in high demand around the globe, and their involvement in the U.S. economy is essential to our continued economic growth and leadership. With unduly restrictive requirements and limited quotas, we run the risk of discouraging the participation of qualified, essential talent in our economy, and of unwittingly shifting jobs overseas.

Among the provisions that should be addressed in any immigration reform legislation are the following:

1) **Exempt all highly-skilled graduates from the H-1B and green card caps.** Foreign nationals who earn graduate-level degrees from U.S. universities should be eligible immediately upon graduation for green cards (permanent residency) and should be exempt from the numerical limit on green cards and H-1B visas issued.

2) **Increase employment-based visa quotas.** Employment-based immigrant visas (H1-B and EB) should be significantly increased (by as much as three times the current level) to meet

market demands. Accompanying family members of professionals should be exempt from the existing quota. Unused quotas in any given fiscal year should be carried over to the next fiscal year.

3) Modernize the visa programs to ensure talented workers can remain in the United States. A revision of the duration limits for H-1B and L visas would help to remove unpredictability for and expenses to businesses encountering agency process delays. Reform of the “immigrant intent” laws affecting student (F-1) and business visas should also be enacted to extend the concept of “dual intent” beyond the H-1B and L categories.

In addition to these reforms, the PEC encourages ongoing improvements in the public face that U.S. enforcement officials convey to foreign visitors and immigrants. The first impression of America that many foreign workers develop will be from their encounters with State Department Consular officials, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) personnel, and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) staff. All too often, the grueling demands on these officials spill over into tense interactions with those who are trying to navigate an often lengthy, confusing and difficult process.

From a policy perspective, more should be done to facilitate a reduction in adjudication times to speed the processing of legitimate immigration petitions. Additional well-trained resources should be devoted to eliminate visa paperwork and interview backlogs. Improvements in customer service in this area would undoubtedly help to enhance recruitment efforts of in-demand talent.

Access to talented professionals will have a profound effect on U.S. competitiveness in the 21st Century economy. Our economy has always benefited from the innovative contribution of immigrants. Given the serious shortages facing the U.S. workforce, now is not the time to place artificial restrictions on international talent. Instead, we should do all we can to employ a visa strategy that will promote the United States as a destination for the world’s brightest and most hard-working people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Maurer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.