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We lose the longer we wait to reform work visas

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(Photo: Marco Bertorello/AFP/Getty Images)

April can be the make or break month for U.S. corporations that goes beyond tax time. It is when businesses file H-1B petitions in hopes to win the coveted visa lottery that allows foreign-born workers to fill job vacancies here.

U.S. businesses that win this nationwide lottery, designed strictly for highly skilled workers, go on to create more jobs than the businesses that lose.

When 100 highly skilled immigrant workers are granted H-1B status to come and work in this nation, 183 more American jobs are created, [according to a study](#) released in 2011 by the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy. Gov. Rick Snyder understands the low cap on the number of visas granted annually greatly impacts Michigan.

In fact, 14,994 additional fewer jobs were created in Michigan between 2008 and 2009 because of that cap, causing a \$135.9-million loss in aggregate annual income by 2010 statewide, according to the [Partnership for a New American Economy](#).

Those facts are just a few reasons why Michigan is one of the most supportive and outspoken states in the nation regarding immigration reform.

Michigan alone will need to fill 227,790 new STEM jobs by 2020, which, as of today, seems impossible because there are not enough U.S.-born college graduates majoring in high-tech fields. Immigrant talent would be the solution if enough workers were granted H-1B visas to fill the void, but that's not the reality. In April 2013, the federal government received 124,000 H-1B petitions for the mere 65,000 available slots.

A study for the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services reveals that the health care industry, in particular, will be greatly impacted within five years if reform does not happen soon — leaving more than 22% of registered nurse roles unfilled. As the state's population ages, this is reason for serious concern.

Only legislative action can repair the system that provides no clear pathway for foreign entrepreneurs to start businesses here or for those valuable, highly skilled workers to bring in their talents to improve U.S. corporations and local communities. The economy suffers as reform is halted.

There are steps that could benefit business immediately. Action must be taken in support of the I-Squared bill introduced by Sen. Orrin Hatch, a Republican from Utah, aimed to create more green cards and H-1B visas, with a cap that adjusts every year according to U.S. economic needs. It is an easy solution that does not need to be political.

While politics are stalling on solutions, foreign-born talent is taking its skills to other lands. It's time that Washington catch up to Michigan's educated attitude on reform.

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