

# Austin American-Statesman

## **OPINION: H-1B VISA HOLDERS ARE KEY TO THE TEXAS ECONOMY**

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Business leaders from around the state, including Texans for Economic Growth, a coalition of 100 Texas business leaders supporting common-sense immigration policies, are united in recognizing the importance of immigrant professionals to the economy. As the CEO of Silicon Labs in Austin, I'm writing this on behalf of 13 CEOs and business groups in Texas, such as the Austin Tech Alliance, North Texas Commission, Technet, Tech Titans, the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#), and the Texas Association of Business. While Texas companies will continue to first employ American workers, we believe it's vital to our economic recovery that we also have access to a robust labor pool in the coming months.

The Trump Administration recently issued an executive order shutting down the issuance of H-1B visas and other work visas like H-2Bs, until the end of the year. This extends an order put in place two months ago. Clearly, this is a policy that negatively impacts technology-related businesses. In 2019, Texas ranked second in the nation in both net tech employment and net tech jobs according to CompTIA. Furthermore, CompTIA's analysis shows that the tech sector accounts for 8.3 percent of the state's total economy, or \$141.7 billion. It's clear that any policy that negatively affects the tech sector will have a sizable negative impact on the Texas economy.

The reality is that the United States does not produce enough highly skilled technical workers to meet our industry's needs. Congress developed the H-1B visa program to bridge the technical skills gap in our domestic workforce, enable American tech companies to compete globally for highly sought-after technical professionals, and create jobs for American workers. President Trump's executive order will hurt the Texas economy by cutting off the supply of some of our most able technical workers. Undoubtedly, it will result in certain highly technical roles being unfilled because there is a talent gap in the United States.

Silicon Labs employs a number of H-1B visa holders in highly technical roles that cannot readily be filled by U.S. workers. We simply can't afford to lose access to this talent to foreign technology companies which we compete against daily.

Texas depends on the economic contributions of immigrants as much or more than any state in the country. Recent analysis shows Texas immigrants paid \$38.6 billion in federal and state and local taxes and hold a spending power of \$112.8 billion.

"If the technical talent is not available in the U.S., then the work and tax dollars will go to the countries where the talent is, it's as simple as that," says Kishore Khandavalli, CEO of SevenTablets, Inc.

In the IT sector, their impact is even more dramatic. According to a recent New American Economy analysis of the American Community Survey, one in four information technology workers, or 1.2 million people, were immigrants in 2018. That percentage jumps to 28.3 percent of IT workers and 26.9 percent of STEM workers for Texas.

"H-1B visas allow us to immigrate unique minds and the most specialized minds in the world to become part of the economic engine of the USA. When we bring in the best people in the world, we improve our competitive advantage over the rest of the world and we stimulate growth and opportunity for all Americans" said Randy Pitchford, founder of the Gearbox Entertainment Company.

As we struggle to reemerge from COVID-19 and a devastating recession, now is not the time to restrict our access to these highly skilled workers. We agree that the U.S. needs to put in place common-sense immigration reform, but this executive order is not the way.

Let's focus on solving COVID-19 and reopening the U.S. for business. Our immigrants can play a critical role.