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U.S. Chamber of Commerce

September 27, 2007

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of Compete America, a coalition of corporations, trade associations, and educators, and other undersigned organizations and companies, we urge Congress to remain focused on taking steps this year to address the highly-skilled immigration crisis facing U.S. employers by reforming the H-1B visa and employment-based green card systems.

As you know, highly educated foreign professionals play a significant role in allowing the United States to maintain an innovative edge over its global competitors. However, our outdated immigration system has made it harder and harder for qualified foreign talent to come to and remain in this country and contribute to our nation's intellectual capital and economic well-being, which, ultimately, poses a serious threat to our global leadership position.

Consider that in April of this year, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) received over 133,000 H-1B visa applications for only 65,000 available slots for fiscal year 2008 – on the very first day applications could be accepted. This arbitrary, unrealistic cap sends the message that America's doors are closed and that these individuals, many of whom have been educated in U.S. universities, should look for opportunity elsewhere. In most cases, those opportunities will be with our foreign competitors.

The H-1B visa program is often used as a temporary step toward permanent resident status for top talent, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of an employment-based (EB) green card. Yet, the shortage of available EB green cards and the massive backlog of pending applications are equally as dire as the H-1B shortage. Those seeking an EB green card can face delays of up to five years or more, leaving them in professional limbo. Furthermore, the existing backlog serves as a major impediment for companies' recruitment and retention efforts of qualified professionals who wish to remain and work in the United States.

Policymakers have recognized the important contributions of these individuals and the imperative of reforming our highly-skilled immigration system. We were pleased to see these issues addressed as part of the comprehensive immigration reform legislation debate in the Senate, and were disappointed when, in the end, it failed to pass a final bill with these provisions. Despite this outcome, we remain optimistic that there are

further opportunities for action on these issues this year. We understand that the House will not be taking up a comprehensive immigration reform bill but would urge you to work with your colleagues to identify other appropriate legislative vehicles for alleviating this growing crisis.

We greatly appreciate your strong commitment to improving the competitiveness of the United States. Over two years ago you traveled across the country to work directly with leaders in the technology community to create *The Innovation Agenda*. Since then, you have demonstrated your commitment to keep America competitive in the world economy and you have recognized that allowing the best and brightest minds to come to the U.S. is an important component in achieving this goal. We understand you have many competing public policy priorities to address in the coming months and hope that highly-skilled immigration reform will remain at the top of your list.

Sincerely,

American Council of Engineering
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Agilent Technologies, Inc.
American Immigration Lawyers
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Association for Human Resources
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Information Technology Association of
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Information Technology Industry Council
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Retail Industry Leaders Association
Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce

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Semiconductor Equipment and Materials
International (SEMI)
Semiconductor Industry Association
Silicon Valley Leadership Group
Software & Information Industry Association
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South Carolina Chamber of Commerce
Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
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