

H-1B VISAS

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to express my frustration over the inability of the Senate to reach a unanimous consent agreement in regard to legislation that addresses the critical shortage of highly skilled workers in the information technology fields. On April 11, 2000, the Senate's Judiciary Committee favorably reported out S. 2045, The American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act, by a vote of 16-2. I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of this important legislation. Unfortunately, this legislation is now being held hostage because some of my colleagues in the Senate wish to attach unrelated amendments to the bill.

There are very few remaining days left in this Congress. Before Congress adjourns for the year, we must pass the remaining appropriations bills, and have them signed into law. In addition, legislation extending Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China, and legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, must be considered. Consequently, there simply is just not enough time for the Senate to debate numerous unrelated amendments on the H-1B visa bill.

Mr. President, our country's burgeoning economy has resulted in an extremely low unemployment rate nationwide. While I am proud of our economy, and our low nationwide unemployment rate, there does exist a tight labor market in many fields, especially the information technology fields. One need only look in the classified section of the Washington Post to see how many high-tech jobs are available in Northern Virginia. This tight labor market makes it difficult for the high-tech industry to fill job openings, and this difficulty is compounded by the fact that our American education system, for one reason or another, is not producing enough individuals with the interest and skills for employment in the information technology fields. If these jobs are not filled, our economy will suffer, and these American companies will move overseas to fill their jobs.

In 1998, Congress and the President recognized the serious effects that the tight labor market could have on the high-tech industry and our economy. In that year, Congress passed, and the President signed into law, legislation increasing the annual ceiling for admission of H-1B nonimmigrants from 65,000 to 115,000 in fiscal year 1999 and fiscal year 2000, and 107,500 in fiscal year 2001. This 1998 act also imposed a \$500 per visa fee to fund training and scholarships for U.S. workers and students.

Nevertheless, despite increasing the H-1B ceiling just two years ago, that increase has proved to be woefully inadequate. In 1999, the H-1B visa ceiling

was reached at the end of 9 months. This fiscal year, the ceiling was reached 6 months into the fiscal year. The effect of the H-1B ceiling being reached before the year's end is that these jobs will remain unfilled, which in turn will only hurt our economy.

The Senate Judiciary's Committee Report on S. 2045 states that the, "shortage of skilled workers throughout the U.S. economy will result in a 5-percent drop in the growth rate of the GDP. That translates into approximately \$200 billion in lost output, nearly \$1,000 for every American." The Committee cites other studies that indicate that a shortage of information technology professionals is costing the U.S. economy as a whole \$105 billion a year. I also found Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's testimony before the Senate's Banking Committee quite compelling. Mr. Greenspan endorsed S. 2045 in response to a question from Senator PHIL GRAMM, and then stated that, "The benefits of bringing in people to do the work here, rather than doing the work elsewhere, to me, should be pretty self-evident."

Now, let me state clearly, it is my preference that these jobs in the information technology fields would be filled with Americans. However, due to the low unemployment rate and the lack of unemployed educated high-tech workers, filling the numerous openings in the information technology fields with Americans is simply not realistic. Therefore, to continue to propel our economy forward, we must pass legislation such as S. 2045 to fill these critical positions in our information technology sector.

This legislation, though, does more than just increase the number of H-1B visas to temporarily fill the job openings in the high-tech industry that cannot be filled by Americans. This bill contains very important provisions that continue the imposition of a \$500 fee per H-1B visa petition. It is estimated that this fee, with the increase in the H-1B ceiling, will raise roughly \$450 million over three years. This money will create 40,000 scholarships for U.S. workers and U.S. students, thereby helping them to choose education in these important fields. Our goal should be to fill these American jobs with trained American workers. These provisions of S. 2045 takes us toward that goal.

Mr. President, in closing, I cannot overstate how important it is for our country's economy to raise the ceiling on H-1B visas, and to provide funding for the training of Americans to fill these jobs. I implore my colleagues to reconsider their demand for votes on unrelated amendments on this legislation. At this late stage in the Congress, demanding votes on unrelated amendments on this legislation will kill this important bill, leave very important jobs in the information technology sec-

tor unfilled, and ultimately, hurt our economy.

VISA WAIVER PILOT PROGRAM

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I wish to explain to my colleagues the reasons for my objection to a unanimous consent request for the Senate to adopt legislation to make the Visa Waiver Pilot Program permanent, H.R. 3767. I do so consistent with the commitment I have made to explain publicly any so-called "holds" that I may place on legislation.

I regret that I am compelled to object to this measure at this point but I do so for reasons similar to those given previously. I believe the Senate should not allow the security of millions of rural Americans to be ignored while we press ahead with legislation to take care of immigration matters.

Since April, a prominent Senate Republican leader has had a de facto hold on a bipartisan bill of critical importance to the security of those who live in rural counties, S. 1608, The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. But time is running out. It is the end of July; there are fewer than 26 legislative days left. People in rural counties across America who have strained under dwindling Federal resource funds need this legislation. They should not be made to wait.

S. 1608 addresses the problems 709 rural counties in 42 states face in trying to fund schools, roads and other basic county services with drastically declining Federal timber payments. These problems affect some 800,000 school children and millions of people. For example, Grant County in eastern Oregon has lost 90 percent of its timber receipts, forcing it to turn to a four-day school week as a cost-saving measure.

This bipartisan bill provides a balanced solution to the problem. The Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported it by voice vote, and it is supported by hundreds of counties, labor organizations, education groups, and the National Association of Counties. I regret having to take this action but am compelled at this point in the legislative year to seek every opportunity to move this critically important legislation.

RURAL AMERICA PROSPERITY ACT OF 2000

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I rise today to express my support of the Rural America Prosperity Act of 2000. I am pleased to be a cosponsor, along with my colleagues, Senators LUGAR, ROBERTS, and SANTORUM. I am a cosponsor of this bill because it gives our farmers some of the tools they need to succeed in today's economy and works to finish what was a key tool in our current agriculture policy.