

REPLY TO:

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## United States Senate

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1501

February 7, 2012

REPLY TO:

- ☐ 103 FEDERAL COURTHOUSE BUILDING  
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(712) 233-1860
- ☐ 210 WATERLOO BUILDING  
531 COMMERCIAL STREET  
WATERLOO, IA 50701-5497  
(319) 232-6657
- ☐ 131 WEST 3RD STREET  
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DAVENPORT, IA 52801-1419  
(563) 322-4331
- ☐ 307 FEDERAL BUILDING  
8 SOUTH 6TH STREET  
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51501-4204  
(712) 322-7103

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I read with interest news reports about your Google Plus "hangout" on January 30<sup>th</sup>, specifically your conversation with Ms. Jennifer Wedel. Ms. Wedel told of her husband's personal struggle in trying to find employment despite the fact that he has an engineering degree and over ten years of experience. She expressed concern that the government continues to distribute H-1B visas at a time of record unemployment.

I was surprised to learn that you responded to Ms. Wedel by saying "industry tells me that they don't have enough highly skilled engineers." You also said that "the word we're getting is that somebody in that kind of high-tech field, that kind of engineer, should be able to find something right away." You said there's a *huge* demand for engineers across the country, with which Ms. Wedel seemed to take issue. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) would also suggest otherwise. According to the BLS, the unemployment rate for electrical engineers rose 3.7% from 2006 to 2010.

Your response to Ms. Wedel leads me to believe that you don't understand the plight of many unemployed high-skill Americans. Mr. Wedel's situation is all too common. Thousands of qualified Americans remain out of work while companies are incentivized to import foreign workers. I'm concerned that you're hearing only one side of the story -- from businesses who claim that there are better and brighter people abroad.

Despite your online chat and interest in investigating the problem, just last week, your administration proposed rules to "attract and retain highly skilled immigrants." The Department of Homeland Security will expand the eligibility for foreign students to stay in the U.S. under the Optional Practical Training program. This program does not have U.S. worker protections, nor does it require that employers pay prevailing wages to these foreign students/employees. Your administration will also provide work authorizations to spouses of H-1B visa holders, thus increasing the competition for many Americans who are looking for work. It's astonishing that, at this time of record unemployment, your administration's solution is to grant more work authorizations to foreign workers. These initiatives will do very little to boost our economy or increase our competitiveness.

RANKING MEMBER,  
JUDICIARY

Committee Assignments:

AGRICULTURE  
BUDGET  
FINANCE

CO-CHAIRMAN,  
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS  
CONTROL CAUCUS

Nevertheless, I'm encouraged by your statement that "The H1-B should be reserved only for those companies who say they cannot find somebody in that particular field." I have long believed that it's not unreasonable to ask businesses to first determine if there are qualified Americans to fill vacant positions. It seems you may agree with this premise.

Therefore, I strongly encourage you to endorse legislation that I have cosponsored with Senator Durbin in the past. Our bill, which has been included in various comprehensive immigration reform proposals, warrants your leadership. With your help, we can reform the H-1B visa program and ensure that Americans like Mr. Wedel are on equal footing with foreign workers who are flooding the market.

While I'm glad that Mr. Wedel has been contacted by many employers since your online discussion took place, there are many more highly skilled Americans that need our help and attention. I hope you'll work with me to make changes to the H-1B visa program on behalf of all these Americans.

I appreciate your consideration of my views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chuck" and last name "Grassley" clearly distinguishable.

Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator