

Money

The Race Is on for H-1B Visas for Tech Workers



By ALICIA ADAMCZYK April 1, 2016

H-1B visa applications for 2017 opened Friday, and if past years are any indication, the U.S. government will again use a lottery-style system to determine which applicants will be allowed to come work here.

U.S. companies can sponsor up to 85,000 foreign workers using H-1B visas, a special designation for highly-skilled workers. The number of applicants is expected to far surpass that number, *The Wall Street Journal* reports, for the third year in a row (in 2015, 233,000 people applied). Companies applying for

the sought-after visas will have an estimated 20% chance of receiving one for employees with a Bachelor's degree, Rita Sostrin, an attorney, told the *Journal*.

Many of the firms lobbying for an increase in the number of visas given out are in Silicon Valley. Critics of increasing the number of visas contend companies should employ U.S. workers first, or believe Silicon Valley uses the system as a way to hire foreign workers at lower wages.

The visas have been a topic of conversation in this year's presidential election. Republican front-runner Donald Trump wants to raise the minimum wage for H1-B workers, [which he says](#) "will improve the number of black, Hispanic and female workers in Silicon Valley who have been passed over in favor of the H-1B program." Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton supports an increase in the number of visas distributed, while Bernie Sanders' views on the matter are more aligned with Trump's.

Universities and nonprofits are not subject to the cap and can hire as many foreign workers as they'd like.

This post has been updated to clarify that companies apply for H1-B visas.