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EDITORIAL

Microsoft moves north

Unable to meet its hiring needs because of U.S. immigration policy, the software company is opening an office in Vancouver

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MICROSOFT CORP. is expanding in the Pacific Northwest, hiring several hundred software wizards to help develop new products. Instead of landing at the Redmond, Wash., mother ship, however, the new workers will toil in Vancouver, British Columbia. Here's why, according to the company's news release (emphasis added): "The Vancouver area is a global gateway with a diverse population, is close to Microsoft's corporate offices in Redmond *and allows the company to recruit and retain highly skilled people affected by immigration issues in the U.S.*"

Consider it just the latest in a series of monuments to the United States' botched immigration policy, as well as a reminder of the Senate's recent failure to pass a comprehensive fix despite bipartisan support. High-tech companies are so frustrated by the limits on visas for skilled labor that they're not just opening offices in India and China to recruit local talent. They're also putting facilities in places like Vancouver for prized recruits from around the world — many of them trained at U.S. universities — who cannot work here.

The demand for H-1B visas for high-skilled immigrants has become so much greater than the supply that almost twice as many applications arrived in a single day as there were slots available for the year — 65,000, plus 20,000 for those with advanced degrees from U.S. schools. Other countries, by contrast, are starting to make it easier for skilled workers to immigrate. That's because they're focusing on the benefits those employees can bring to their economies, not the competition they present to native labor.

Many of these immigrants become the innovators and entrepreneurs who create companies, employ more people and create wealth. Just look at the U.S. experience — **about 25% of all venture-capital-backed start-ups here were launched or co-founded by foreign nationals**, including Yahoo, Google and EBay. The same benefits come from talented U.S. workers too, but not enough of them are pursuing science, math and engineering careers to fill the voracious demand at Microsoft and other high-tech powerhouses. A comprehensive fix to U.S. immigration policy is overdue, but failing that, Congress should at least adopt a more sensible approach to H-1B visas.