

## **Kirk Says U.S. Visa Restrictions Hobbling Business Efforts**

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U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said the nation's policy for issuing visas is hurting the economy by limiting tourism and blocking overseas buyers of American products from coming to the U.S. for training.

"We will engage on the visa issue, which is frankly crippling us right now," Kirk said today in Washington. "We hear from business after business, 'We go, we make these sales, and my customers can't get a visa to come here to learn how to use the product.' We are past-due to have a common-sense immigration policy, and we need to have visa reform as part of that."

In January, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the nation needs to ease restrictions on immigrants who plan to open U.S. businesses, and create a separate visa for potential entrepreneurs.

Efforts at overhauling immigration laws are stymied in Congress, including a proposal to let temporary foreign workers enter the U.S. and help illegal immigrants advance toward citizenship. The debate has overshadowed the need to change the U.S. visa program, according to the Chamber, the largest business group.

Current laws make it difficult for people to enter the U.S. and start a business, according to a Jan. 25 report from the Chamber and the Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Council, a Washington-based nonprofit. Expansion of the visa program would also aid companies' access to foreign-born graduates of U.S. universities, helping economic growth, the authors of the report said.

### **Speeding Visas**

President Barack Obama on Jan. 19 gave the departments of Homeland Security and State 60 days to write a plan for speeding visa applications from China and Brazil. Obama's order recommends cutting the process to three weeks from four months.

Visa-processing capacity in China and Brazil must increase 40 percent in the next year, according to the order.

"Our tourism numbers are up, but one of the things constraining it is the difficulty some people are having in getting visas," Kirk said in remarks at a meeting today of the National Association of Counties.

Speeding the visa process may create 1.3 million jobs and add \$850 billion to the economy by 2020, the National Retail Federation said in a Jan. 19 report, citing the U.S. Travel Association.

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