Reverse Immigration Jeopardizes U.S. Economy

While the U.S. Border Patrol has its hands full trying to stop the flow of illegal aliens into our country, a Duke University professor says the nation is in danger of losing too many legal immigrants to their native homelands.

As reported in *USA Today*, Vivek Wadhwa describes this reverse immigration of skilled workers as a "brain drain" that is hitting America for the first time in its history. "What was a trickle has become a flood," he was quoted by *USA Today* as saying. He predicted that 100,000 immigrants will go back to India and the same number to China within the next five years. One of the lures for these talented individuals is the rapid economic growth of those countries, but Wadhwa says it means the U.S. faces losing its competitive edge in fields like science and technology.

Other experts agree. Suren Dutia is the CEO of TiE Global, an organization that promotes worldwide entrepreneurship. He was quoted by *USA Today* as saying, "If the country is going to maintain the kind of economic well-being that we’ve enjoyed for many years, that requires having these incredibly gifted individuals who have been educated and trained by us."

Wadhwa recently surveyed more than 1,000 immigrants who have returned to China and India. According to the survey, it would be a mistake to think of the exodus as a temporary trend due to the faltering U.S. economy, because respondents said their decisions had more to do with career opportunities, and improved quality of life and purchasing power in their native lands, as well as cultural factors. In fact, China is actively recruiting expatriates, offering incentives such as financial assistance and housing. A spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, Wang Baodong, explained, "China needs a lot of well-trained personnel."

Many survey respondents also expressed irritations with the immigration process in the United States. "They’re frustrated with having an uncertain immigration status," explains Lynn Shotwell, executive director of the American Council on International Personnel. Instead of waiting up to a decade for permanent residency, they are "giving up," she says.

The United States sets a quota on the number of skilled worker visas it grants each year, so there are not enough for all of the applicants from India and China. Applications for green-card status made before April 16, 2001 are only now in process. While they are waiting for permanent status, immigrants are restricted in international travel and in their ability to get promotions. Meanwhile, opportunities are opening up in their more familiar and inviting homelands. The International Monetary Fund predicts a 7.5 percent growth this year in China’s gross domestic product (GDP) and a 5.4 percent expansion of

India’s. On the other hand, the U.S. GDP will likely shrink by 2.6 percent.