Google™

Testimony of Laszlo Bock
Vice President, People Operations, Google, Inc.
House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship,
Refugees, Border Security, and International Law
"Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform: Business Community Perspectives"
June 6, 2007

Madam Chair, Ranking Member King, members of the committee.

It's a great pleasure to be with you this morning to talk about the impact of immigration policies on Google and the technology industry as a whole. My name is Laszlo Bock, and I am the Vice President for People Operations at Google. I am responsible for Google's global efforts to attract, develop, and retain the most talented employees -- wherever we may find them.

Let me say up front that my expertise is people, not legislation. I come before you not to discuss the nuances of the various immigration reform proposals before Congress, but rather to help the committee better understand the practical impact that our immigration system has on Google, our employees, and the ability of our company and other U.S. technology companies to stay competitive in the global economy.

Google has had a positive experience with American immigration policy that dates back to its very inception, when our search engine was just a shared idea in the minds of our company's founders, Sergey Brin and Larry Page. Sergey's parents fled the Soviet Union in 1979 when he was six. A first-generation American, he is now one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world.

That his success happened here in the U.S. is no coincidence. We opened our doors to Sergey's parents -- a mathematician and an economist. Our educational system served Sergey well -- he attended the University of Maryland and Stanford University. Our free market economy supported Sergey and Larry's entrepreneurship and rewarded it when they proved that they could turn their idea into a successful business. And we continue to maintain an environment where entrepreneurs, regardless of where they started, want to come here to build their companies.

In fact, Google is just the most recent success story for immigrants in Silicon Valley and in other tech hubs around our nation. Intel, eBay, Yahoo!, Sun Microsystems, and many other companies were all founded by immigrants who were welcomed by America. In fact, over the last 15 years, foreign nationals have started 25 percent of U.S. venture-backed public companies, accounting for more than $500 billion in market capitalization and adding significant value to our economy.

And within Google, there are countless examples of immigrants and non-immigrant foreign workers playing a vital role in our company. H-1B visa holders have helped lead the development of Google News and orkut, our social networking site. Immigrants from countries like Canada, Iran, and Switzerland now lead our business operations, global marketing, global business development, and data infrastructure operations. Combined, these four former visa holders manage more than half of Google's U.S. employees. Without these talented employees and others, Google -- and the high-tech industry as a whole -- would not be the success it is today.

1

I will take a moment to note, Madam Chair, that I too am an immigrant to America. My parents came here when they fled communist Romania when I was a child. My mother is here with me today. I cannot begin to tell you what a proud moment this is for her -- and a humbling one for me. Under the Ceauşescu dictatorship, she could not have dreamed of her son testifying before a committee of the United States Congress.

In my testimony this morning I'd like to make three major points:

- First, Google's success -- like that of technology companies across our nation -- absolutely depends on attracting the best and the brightest employees.

- Second, hiring and retaining the most talented employees -- regardless of national origin -- is essential to the United States' ability to compete globally.

- And third, companies like Google and the U.S. as a whole would benefit from improving our policies towards non-U.S. workers – including in the area of H-1B visas – so we can continue innovating and growing.

Google's Success Depends on Attracting the Best and Brightest

First I'll talk about the role that our employees play at Google.

It's no accident that my title is Vice President of People Operations, and not the more traditional description of "human resources." At Google, we believe that people are our most vital competitive asset, and the single most important ingredient to ensuring our future growth and success.

Our strategy is simple: We hire great people and encourage them to make their dreams a reality. We believe in hard work, a fun atmosphere, and the sort of creativity that only comes about when talented people approach problems from varying backgrounds. We also believe that in addition to hiring the best talent, a diversity of perspectives, ideas, and cultures leads to the creation of better products and services for our users.

We view our people as central to our mission, and I'm happy to say we treat them well. As you may have heard, Googlers dine on gourmet food for free at any one of the 15 restaurants at our headquarters. New Googlers -- or "nooglers" -- sometimes gain what's called the Google 15, and when they do they can get free training at our gym, or play volleyball, swim, or rock climb on campus. Google gives our employees $500 worth of takeout when they have a newborn child and we provide child care. We give employees $5,000 toward the purchase of a hybrid car and provide car washes at our main campus. And we let Googlers bring their dogs -- and even their dirty laundry -- with them to work.

We are proud that our efforts to keep our employees happy has helped earn us *Fortune* Magazine's top ranking in its 2007 list of the "Best Companies to Work For," and that a recent *BusinessWeek* survey of college students named Google one of the "Best Places to Launch a Career."

In the knowledge-based economy that we operate in, companies -- from start-ups to multinational corporations -- depend primarily on their employees for their success. America's edge in the world economy depends on the ability of U.S. companies to innovate and create the next generation of must-have products and services. And that ability to innovate and create in turn depends on having the best and brightest workers.

Google's hiring process is rigorous, and we make great efforts to uncover the most talented employees we can find. Often times, many of these exceptional employees were born here in the United States and have spent their whole lives here. But in other cases, the most talented software engineer or product manager we can find happens to have been born elsewhere. As a result, Google depends on programs like the H-1B visa for highly skilled workers.

Let me share some figures with you. Today, approximately eight percent of Google's employees in the United States are here on a six-year H-1B visa. These Googlers currently span 80 different countries of origin -- from Argentina to Zambia. So, while nine out of ten of our employees are citizens or permanent residents, our need to find the specialized skills required to run our business successfully requires us to look at candidates from around the globe -- many of whom are already in the U.S. studying at one of our great universities.

It is no stretch to say that without these employees, we might not be able to develop future revolutionary products like the next Gmail or Google Earth.

Let me share two examples:

- Orkut Buyukkokten was born in Konya, Turkey, and later received his Ph.D. in computer science from Stanford University. He joined Google as a software engineer in 2002 through the H-1B visa program. Every engineer at Google is allotted what we call "20 percent time," giving them the freedom to spend one day a week pursuing whatever projects interest them. In his 20 percent time, Orkut developed and programmed a new social networking service, which Google later launched publicly and dubbed -- you guessed it -- "orkut." Today, orkut -- the web service -- has tens of millions of users worldwide, and is so popular in Brazil that Orkut -- the person -- was treated as a celebrity on a recent visit there. After spending four years in the U.S. on an H-1B visa, Orkut recently received his green card for permanent residency.

- Krishna Bharat joined Google even earlier, in 1999, and also through the H-1B program. A native of India, he received his Ph.D. from Georgia Tech in human computer interaction. His work on web search at DEC Systems Research Center and at Google earned him several patents, and he is a noted authority on search engine technology. Krishna was one of the chief creators of Google News, our service that aggregates more than 4,500 English-language news websites around the world. Today, Krishna serves as Google's Principal Scientist, and he too has received his green card for permanent residency.

Without Orkut and Krishna -- and many, many other employees -- Google would not be able to offer innovative and useful new products to our users. Immigrations laws that enable us to attract and retain highly skilled workers, regardless of their country of origin, make that possible.

Opening Our Economy Will Help Us Stay Competitive Globally

Now let me turn to the issue of how our immigration system affects our ability to compete with the rest of the world.

We believe that it is in the best interests of the United States to welcome into our workforce talented individuals who happen to have been born elsewhere, rather than send them back to their countries of origin. But this doesn't mean we don't recruit here in the U.S., or that American workers are being left behind. To the contrary, we are creating jobs here in the U.S. every day.

From December 2004 through March 2007, we have grown from almost 5,700 Googlers to over 12,200 employees – more than doubling our size in just over two years. Since the beginning of this year we have grown by approximately 2,000 employees. A recent *New York Times* article noted that we are adding about 500 employees each month, and that we recently listed almost 800 open positions in the San Francisco Bay Area alone.

But we're not the only ones recruiting talented engineers, scientists, and mathematicians. The fact is that we are in a fierce worldwide competition for top talent unlike ever before. As companies in India, China, and other countries step up efforts to attract highly skilled employees, the United States must continue to focus on attracting and retaining these great minds.

Simply put, if U.S. employers are unable to hire those who are graduating from our universities, foreign competitors will. The U.S. scientific, engineering, and tech communities cannot hope to maintain their present position of international leadership if they are unable to hire and retain highly educated foreign talent. We also cannot hope to grow our economy and create more jobs if we are ceding leadership in innovation to other nations.

You might wonder why we care so much, when we have a global presence and can locate engineers in foreign facilities. Indeed, as a global company, Google is fortunate to be able to have employees work for us in other countries if they are not allowed to stay in the U.S. It is vital to have a local presence in other countries, to help tailor our products and services for our international users.

However, many of our core products are created and improved here in the U.S., and we believe that worker satisfaction is higher when employees can work in the location they prefer. Being able to have H-1B visa holders remain in the U.S., building our products and expanding our business, also translates into more jobs and greater economic growth here at home.

Our Day-to-Day Experience Leads Us To Believe Some Improvements Are Needed

So, what does my day-to-day experience as Google's people operations guy teach me about what our country should do to attract and retain the best and the brightest?

First and most importantly, each and every day we find ourselves unable to pursue highly qualified candidates because there are not enough H-1B visas. We would encourage Congress to significantly increase the annual cap of 65,000 H-1B visas, to a figure more reflective of the growth rate of our technology-driven economy.

As the members of this subcommittee know well, in April 2007, the number of petitions to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services exceeded the current annual cap within the first two days of the Fiscal Year 2008 filing period, with an estimated 133,000 visa applications filed. This marked the ninth time since 1997 that the cap has been reached before the end of the fiscal year and the fourth year in a row that it has been reached on or before the start of the fiscal year.

The H-1B crisis also affects recent college graduates. When we recruit talented foreign-born students to work for Google after they graduate, those students are not allowed to apply for H-1B visas until after they graduate. As a result, they miss the springtime application deadlines for the H-1B window that opens each fall.

In order to attract these talented new graduates, Google generally hires them under an immigration program called Optional Practical Training (OPT), which allows a student to work in the U.S. for up to 12 months. So for example, if a student graduates in June 2007, they might begin work at Google in August

4

2007, and they could work at Google in the U.S. through August 2008. They would have the ability to apply for an H-1B in the spring of 2008, but even if they are successful in securing an H-1B, that visa would not start until October 2008. So between August 2008 and October 2008, there is a two-month lag in which they would not be allowed to work in the U.S.

In many cases we offer employees affected by this lag the option to work out of one of our offices abroad. But over the last year alone, the artificially low cap on H-1B visas has prevented more than 70 Google candidates from receiving H-1B visas.

Beyond increasing the H-1B visa cap, we also believe that Congress should address the significant backlog in employment-based green cards for highly skilled workers.

These green card holders must pass strict labor market tests in order to be eligible for admission. Google wants to retain talented foreign-born employees that we currently have on payroll, but the green card backlogs force tens of thousands of highly trained professionals into legal and professional limbo for years.

These backlogs make it difficult for employers to promote employees already on payroll or allow them to change jobs or employers, often forcing spouses to also put their careers on hold. And unfortunately, many of these valued employees become frustrated with the inefficiencies in the immigration system, give up because of the up to five-year waits, and either move home or seek employment in more welcoming countries -- countries that are direct economic competitors to the United States.

Conclusion

I'd like to close by telling you about another Googler. Olcan Sercinoglu was born in Turkey and came to the U.S. to study at Washington University in St. Louis. He graduated at the top of his class with a degree in computer science and a 4.0 grade point average. In 2002 he received an H-1B visa, which allowed him to join Google full time as a software engineer. Since joining the company he has been promoted three times and has made significant contributions to building the data infrastructure that supports Google's search, advertising, and web-based applications. Today Olcan is awaiting his green card, after being forced to wait almost two years to begin the application process.

Had Olcan been forced to return to Turkey, he would have no doubt made a major impact at a technology company there, but the H-1B visa has allowed him to contribute to the success of an American company, and to the success of a U.S. economy. As Congress considers the various immigration proposals before you, we hope you will consider Olcan's experience, as well as the important role that our immigration policies play in ensuring that the U.S. remains the world's high-tech leader.

Thank you.