



President Announces Support For Bill To Drastically Cut Legal Immigration Levels

Insights

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President Trump has just announced his support for new immigration legislation aimed at curtailing overall immigration into the country. An original version of the bill was introduced earlier this year by Senators Tom Cotton of Arkansas and David Perdue of Georgia; the modified version of the bill is called Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy, or the RAISE Act. Trump announced his support for the bill today, noting that the current system “has not been fair to our people, to our citizens, to our workers.” The goal of the bill is to reduce legal immigration by 50%, which President Trump stated “will reduce poverty, increase wages, and save taxpayers billions and billions of dollars.”

The present immigration system allows individuals to immigrate through employment, family, and the diversity lottery. The annual minimum family-sponsored limit is 226,000, although immediate family members – defined as spouse and minor children of US citizens – are not subject to numerical limits. The annual employment-based limit is 140,000. These numbers, however, are further governed by preference categories and per-country limits. As of November 1, 2015, due to the above limits, there was a backlog of 4,455,274 family-based petitions and 100,747 employment-based petitions.

The RAISE Act, as originally introduced, would cut total legal immigration numbers by eliminating the family preference categories, which are adult siblings of U.S. citizens, unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens, married adult children of U.S. citizens, immediate spouses and children of legal permanent residents and unmarried adult children of legal permanent residents. It would not affect the immediate family category for US Citizens.

Another method for individuals to legally enter the country is through the Diversity Lottery; currently, entrants are limited to 50,000. The RAISE ACT also would eliminate Diversity Lottery altogether, and would limit refugees offered permanent residency to 50,000 per year.

According to Senator Cotton’s website, the RAISE Act would reduce overall immigration by 41% in its first year and 50% within 10 years. Senator Cotton cites immigration projection from Princeton and Harvard professors, which indicate that the RAISE Act would lower overall immigration to 637,960 in its first year and to 539,958 by its tenth year—a 50% reduction from the 1,051,031 immigrants who arrived in 2015.

On the flip side, the Act would create temporary visa for parents of U.S. citizens who need to come to the US for caretaking. The parents would not be permitted to work, cannot access public benefits, and must be guaranteed support and health insurance by their sponsoring children. Since the bill was first introduced, Cotton and Perdue have been working to add merit-based criteria, modeled after programs in Canada and Australia that prefer highly skilled individuals, English speakers, and those who can support themselves financially.

While President Trump has now publicly offered his support for this bill, it seems unlikely that it will gain any traction in the Senate, particularly in light of the issues encountered trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The bill is unlikely to garner any support from Democrats, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer calling the bill a “non-starter.” Further, there are Republicans who have already come out against it. Lindsey Graham has been quoted as saying “part of this proposal would reduce legal immigration by half, including many immigrants who work legally in our agriculture, tourism and service industries,” which he believes would “devastate” South Carolina's economy. Similarly, many economists across the country believe that curbing legal immigration will actually slow US job growth, having the opposite effect of what the administration intends.

We will continue to monitor this legislation and provide updates as they are available.

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