

If you're a skilled worker, but not from India, good luck getting into the U.S.



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At the same time that the Trump White House is crushing the hopes and aspirations of asylum seekers and those seeking a better life in the United States through illegal practices, Congress is about to seriously disrupt, if not end, immigration of high-skilled workers into this country for the foreseeable future.

With lightning speed and without any hearings, the House of Representatives passed HR 1044. The legislation, proposed for years by the tech industry, grants permanent residency to Indian nationals by allowing them to use all available visas in the skilled-worker categories for most of the next decade. Because Democrats want to help their high-rolling friends in the tech industry and Republicans gleefully see an end to employment-based immigration, the bill has strong bipartisan support.

The problem is, it is terrible public policy.

For many years, Indian nationals in the computer fields have rightly complained that they are being held in limbo without any chance of becoming lawful permanent residents. The current waiting time to obtain residency is more than 10 years. There are 550,000 nationals waiting to obtain residency in one of the employment-based categories (EB-2) and 512,000 are Indian nationals. HR 1044 (and its Senate counterpart S 386) end country quotas, make visas available based solely on waiting times and, after a short transition period, essentially give all the visas to Indian nationals.

There are two pronounced effects of this policy. First, other high-

skilled workers in health-care and medical research — two areas of great significance to the nation, and especially Florida — will be shut out of residency for well over a decade. But it will also mean all other high-skilled workers in basic science, engineering, chemistry, physics, artificial intelligence, climate change and many other fields will be discouraged from ever coming to the United States. Second, the waiting times for residency under HR 1044/S 386 will range from 10 years to *31 years* after Indian nationals use the visas.

The solution to the problem is not fighting over the few visas that are available and pitting Indian nationals against the rest of the world, but creating a system where more visas are available, where the health industry is considered a priority and where the system encourages skilled workers to remain in the United States.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, has introduced such a bill — the BELIEVE Act — designed to accomplish that goal by doubling the number of visas; ending the ridiculous process of counting spouses and children of high-skilled workers when allocating visas; giving some limited priority to healthcare workers in rural areas; allowing early filing of residency for such high-skilled workers.

The United States gets highly skilled immigrants from all over the world, in a wide range of valuable professions. Tech employers want to cut off all of that, simply because it is not IT workers from India. A single industry wants to sole-source American immigration policy at the expense of health care, cutting edge research, and well, the whole world. Congress should at least hold a hearing before going over the cliff.

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