

NATIONAL REVIEW

Rand Paul's New Bill Would Increase Employment-Based Immigration 'Nearly Fourfold'

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Most of the immigration talk today has involved Elizabeth Warren's new plan, which would deliberately scale back immigration enforcement and make it easier to come to the U.S. on the basis of "family reunification."

Senator Rand Paul's idea is better, but not great either.

His new bill, the BELIEVE Act (seriously), is essentially a competitor to the Fairness for High Skills Immigrants Act, which I discussed here earlier this week (and which passed the House Wednesday). Both address the clumsy "per-country caps" for green cards that make it far easier to join the U.S. from some countries than others, and that disproportionately hurt higher-skilled and higher-paid immigrants.

As I mentioned in my previous post, killing those caps without fixing some other aspects of the immigration system could have unintended consequences, so a broader bill would be preferable. Paul's bill is indeed broader, but not always in a good way.

As David Bier of the Cato Institute reports, Paul would double most of the employment-based green-card categories, raising their total from 140,000 to 270,000 — and on top of that would exempt spouses and minor children from the limits, which in effect doubles them again, for a "nearly fourfold" increase. Those working in "shortage occupations" designated by the Department of Labor, a list that now includes only nurses and physical therapists but could expand via new regulations, would be exempt as well. Unlimited green cards would also be available to "any foreign graduate of a U.S. university who ever entered as a child of an E, H, or L temporary worker and lived in the United States for an aggregate period of at least 10 years." "Employment authorization to spouses and minor children of temporary workers" is tossed in for good measure.

There would be no cuts to the family-based categories to compensate. We currently hand out a bit more than a million green cards a year. Just by back-of-the-envelope math, quadrupling employment green cards by itself would have to hike that number somewhere around a third.

As I've pointed out numerous times, higher overall immigration levels are not what Americans want. (Neither are lower levels.) The goal should be to shift the *mix* of immigrants toward the higher-skilled, not to hike high-skilled immigration while leaving everything else the same.

When D.C. can show the American people that (A) the border is under control and (B) the legal-immigration system is serving the national interest by admitting the very best immigrants available, perhaps we can have a discussion about expanding the latter. Not until then.