



Trump issues executive order limiting temporary work visas

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President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Monday that will suspend temporary visas for foreign workers until the end of 2020, angering advocates who say he is targeting immigrants for domestic political reasons.

The order applies to a variety of work visas used for many types of jobs, a move that the administration says could free up as many as 525,000 jobs to be filled by Americans.

But immigration groups, which have been bracing for the order for days, argue that Trump is targeting immigrants to placate his political base.

"Immigrant workers are vital to the American workforce," said Beth Werlin, executive director of the American Immigration Council. "As our nation recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, immigrants in all industries will be essential to rebuilding our nation."

Trump's latest move follows his decision in April to temporarily suspend immigration to the U.S., a move he said was needed to protect American jobs in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Trump suspended the issuance of green cards for 60 days to foreign citizens who want to live in the U.S. That order was to expire Monday.

The new order extends Trump's original ban through Dec. 30 and expands it by imposing restrictions on work visas.

The freeze applies to H-1B visas designed for high-skilled workers, particularly in the tech industry, and H-2B visas used by seasonal workers, such as in the construction and hospitality industries. Others that are impacted are H-4 visas given to spouses of H-1B visa holders; L-1 visas for executives who work for large corporations; and some J-1 visas for scholars and professors.

In addition, Trump has instructed his aides to begin work on long-term reforms to the immigration system, including changing the way H-1B visas are distributed. Right now, the H-1B visas are distributed by lottery. The new approach would allot them to applicants who earn the highest wages.

The decision to suspend temporary work visas comes days after the Supreme Court struck down the Trump administration's effort to wind down the DACA program to shield those brought to the country illegally as children from deportation. In a blow to the White House, the court's liberals joined with Chief Justice John Roberts in blocking the effort. Trump said his administration will try to end the legal protections for "Dreamers."

David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, said suspending the L-1 visa for foreign corporate executives would hurt the American economy. "It's a crucial tool for growth and innovation and the admin would hurt the recovery by ending it," he tweeted.

Kerri Talbot of the Immigration Hub, an immigrants' rights advocacy group, accused Trump and his senior adviser Stephen Miller of "scapegoating immigrants and refugees to distract from the administration's failures to put forward a meaningful response to the coronavirus pandemic."

"Today's order and the administration's recent actions on asylum have nothing to do with combating the virus or providing any relief for struggling families," Talbot said. "This proclamation is just more political fodder rooted in racism and white supremacy for Trump's base."

Trump supporters and groups advocating for reduced levels of immigration hailed the move.

"Great news," tweeted U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz. "Keep the exemptions tight. Hire American."

Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said Trump promised to put American workers first, "and, to his credit, he did just that."

"Voters understand that continued high levels of immigration and guest worker admissions are an impediment to American workers recovering along with the economy," Stein said. "Perhaps most importantly, this pause provides an opportunity to structure long-term reforms to massively abused guest worker programs."