



## President Trump's new immigration proposal would be terrible for tech

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President Donald Trump's "merit-based" immigration proposal is never going to happen. But what it does do is try and cover up the fact that his administration has systematically thwarted high-skilled immigrants and the tech companies trying to employ them.

Using executive orders, the president has made it more difficult — and expensive — to hire high-skilled tech workers from other countries. The administration has throttled a program that encouraged entrepreneurs to come to the US. It's also ending work permits for spouses of H-1B holders, who are often highly skilled professionals themselves, among other measures to stop immigration. One result has been a net decline in high-skilled visas, known as H-1Bs, which has been bad for tech companies in the US (but good for Canada).

In a Rose Garden speech yesterday, Trump proposed a plan that *sounded* like it would be good for tech.

He suggested replacing green cards for US citizens' siblings, parents, and adult children — as well as permanent residents' spouses and children, among others — with visas for workers, especially high-skilled ones. Using a merit-based point system, the proposal would favor people with "extraordinary talent," "professional and specialized vocations," and "exceptional academic track records."

The overall number of issuances would remain the same at 1.1 million.

Of all green cards, these so-called "Build America" visas would capture 57 percent for people in the employment and skill category, plus 33 percent for immediate family, and 10 percent to humanitarian causes, according to the White House fact sheet, which is otherwise rather sparse on details.

Currently, the majority of green cards are issued to families of US citizens.

Using what information the White House did provide as well as existing immigration data, Boundless Immigration, a venture-backed company that helps people navigate the US immigration system, took an educated guess as to how the proposal would shift green card issuance:

While at first this may seem good for tech — an industry experiencing cutthroat competition for the limited number of US tech workers — it's completely unrealistic. You can't expect people to move and work here without the hope of bringing their families with them.

It's also insulting that the White House is only paying lip service to high-skilled workers and their families.

People coming to work in the US — who aid American companies and generally benefit the overall economy — are entitled to live full lives. For many immigrants (not to mention, people in general) these lives include their families. These relationships also contribute to integration and child care, assets not easily quantified in dollars and cents.

“They’re hiding the fact that that’s a huge downside by trying to create a dichotomy between supposedly low-skill, low-paid, family immigrants and high-tech, high-wage, not-jobs-stealing, merit-based immigrants,” Doug Rand, a Boundless co-founder, told Recode. “The fact is everyone has family.”

Not allowing high-skilled tech immigrants to bring their families would inhibit workers’ willingness to accept jobs here. They can work elsewhere. Indeed, tech immigrants are increasingly choosing to take jobs in Canada, where the immigration policy is more liberal.

Still, there are enough people who want to immigrate to the US that the 1.1 million spots would be filled even if this dead-on-arrival proposal did happen, according to David Bier, a policy analyst at Cato Institute who specializes in immigration.

“You’re just going to have a different type of person who wants to come here as a consequence of restriction on family sponsorships,” Bier said.