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Congress to Consider Legislation Pushed by Anti-Immigrant Hate Groups

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Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) has introduced one of two planned anti-immigrant bills that can be traced to the talking points of white nationalist, anti-immigrant hate groups known as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), whose members are part of the Trump administration.

Smith's Immigration in the National Interest Act is the U.S. House of Representatives' version of the RAISE Act, which seeks to drastically reduce legal immigration and creates a points-based merit test for entering the United States—a test only 2 percent of adult Americans would pass. Advocates warn the RAISE Act is "inherently racist."

The other piece of legislation, the Legal Workforce Act, purports to save jobs for American workers by requiring electronic verification for all new hires.

In August, when President Trump endorsed the Raise Act, which was introduced by Sens. Tom Cotton (R-AR) and David Perdue (R-GA), Carl Lipscombe, deputy director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), told *Rewire* that because the RAISE Act prioritizes English speakers, immigrants from predominately white countries will be fast tracked. The bill looks to eliminate the primary pathways Black immigrants take to the US.

The RAISE Act places a cap on refugee admissions at 50,000 a year and calls for reductions to family-based immigration programs, ending the visa diversity lottery that, according to the *Washington Post*, awards 50,000 green cards a year, mostly to African applicants. These immigration policies have been in place for decades, some for more than half a century, as the *Post* noted. There have been no indications from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the services-arm of the immigration system, that the family-based visa system and the diversity visa program aren't working.

BAJI's research found that nearly 69 percent of Black immigrants come to the United States via sponsorship by relatives or through the diversity visa lottery. The RAISE Act, according to Lipscombe, targets every path Black immigrants take to the United States.

"We've seen the attacks on undocumented communities and so it's almost a logical next step for this administration to begin targeting the few paths that Black immigrants have to get to the U.S.

and obtain documents,” Lipscombe told Rewire in August. “This is absolutely about excluding Black and brown immigrants from the country.”

The Legal Workforce Act requires businesses to use E-Verify, an Internet-based system through USCIS that compares information from a worker’s Form I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification to data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Social Security Administration to confirm a person can legally work in the United States. Technically, undocumented immigrants cannot be legally employed in the U.S., which makes the 11 million people residing in the country without authorization susceptible to exploitation, wage theft, and other abuses.

Requiring employers to use E-Verify would be costly. In 2016, DHS reported that a mandatory nationwide rollout of E-Verify could cost up to \$214 million in the first four years, though that may be a conservative estimate. The Congressional Budget Office estimated in 2013 the cost for the federal government over five years would exceed \$600 million, and a Bloomberg analysis placed the cost for small businesses at \$2.6 billion. According to the Cato Institute, E-Verify “has a startling degree of inaccuracy” and “places the onus of immigration law enforcement on American employers.”

Immigrant rights advocates are calling attention to Smith’s sources for the immigration bills. The RAISE Act was crafted in coordination with Julie Kirchner, the former executive director of FAIR, as NPR reported in February. Kirchner was welcomed into the Trump administration as chief of staff of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the federal agency that oversees Border Patrol, but is now ombudsman for USCIS.

Why is this troublesome to advocates? During Kirchner’s time as executive director, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) designated FAIR a “hate group” for its “demonization of non-white immigrants,” to quote the Center for Immigration Integrity. FAIR, along with anti-immigrant hate groups CIS and NumbersUSA, have dictated immigration policies for years, including from within Trump’s White House, while worming themselves into national mainstream media, which treats these organizations as credible sources on immigration. All three of these hate groups were founded by John Tanton, a white nationalist supporter of eugenics who is considered the father of the modern anti-immigrant movement and who once infamously warned of a Latino “onslaught.”

CIS has publicly pushed for the RAISE Act, and its executive director, Mark Krikorian, has been a vocal proponent of E-Verify, relying on misinformation to push for a mandatory, nationwide rollout of the system. This falls in line with the group’s practice of manipulating numbers and using questionable sources “to advance their anti-immigrant agenda,” according to the Center for Immigration Integrity. “CIS has not been coy in citing virulent racist authors, white nationalists, and anti-Semites.”

This was apparent at a House Oversight Subcommittee on National Security hearing in April that focused on a debunked CIS report by the organization’s director of research, Steven Camarota. Despite promoting a widely denounced report by Heritage Foundation researchers, Camarota is routinely called on as an immigration expert.

One of that report’s authors, Jason Richwine, argued in his dissertation that genetic differences in intelligence and aptitude exist between whites, Asians, and other races. Camarota referred to the Heritage report as the “most detailed and exhaustive ever done on this topic.” Camarota also had

bylines at Tanton's *Social Contract Press*, a white nationalist journal that published the English translation of the "stunningly racist" novel *The Camp of Saints*—the book former White House chief strategist Stephen Bannon cites in interviews explaining his views on immigrants.

There is no overlooking Smith's connections to these anti-immigrant hate groups. According to the Center for Immigration Integrity, Smith has participated in panel discussions and teleconferences set up by CIS, and he is an associate of Krikorian. "While testifying before Congress, Krikorian was praised by Rep. Smith, who said, 'I'd like to single out Mr. Krikorian and thank him for his excellent testimony. I honestly don't know how anyone could disagree with one word,'" according to the Center for Immigration Integrity.

The Legal Workforce Act was introduced Friday. The Immigration in the National Interest Act will be introduced later this week.