



Let the states sort out immigration

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In 2019, representative John Curtis, a Republican from Utah, introduced what he called the State-Sponsored Visa Pilot Program Act. It would have allowed a new avenue for immigration by authorizing states to sponsor people for three-year, renewable work visas. The bill found no co-sponsors and never came up for debate, but Curtis told me he intends to reintroduce it in the current Congress.

Delegating immigration authority to the states is not a new concept; Senator Ron Johnson, a Republican from Wisconsin, introduced a similar plan in 2017. According to Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, bills seeking authority to issue work visas have been introduced in 11 state legislatures since 2008, and three such bills have been voted into law. But the federal government has ignored them.

One problem is that people just can't get their mind around letting someone other than the federal government decide who comes and stays. You can't have individual states picking immigrants for the whole country! What about security? What about fairness? Could a conservative state discriminate on the grounds of, say, race or religion?

But the idea is not really that dramatic. This proposal wouldn't encroach on the existing federal systems for visas, refugees, or family reunification. Any state-sponsored work permits would be in addition to the current number. The federal government would still vet the applications and control permanent residency and citizenship. Federal law and the Constitution would still forbid discrimination.