



Is President Trump Weakening On His Pledge To Protect American Workers?

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President Trump's visit to the Mexican border garnered lots of attention, but a tweet he sent on his way back to Washington went virtually unnoticed.

"H1-B (*sic*) holders in the United States can rest assured that changes are soon coming which will bring both simplicity and certainty to your stay, including a potential path to citizenship. We want to encourage talented and highly skilled people to pursue career options in the U.S.," said Trump on Friday.

The president should know that foreign guest workers already can remain in the U.S. while they apply for a green card or citizenship. But that is the least concerning (and confusing) aspect of the tweet.

"This would be a radical about-face on everything he's said and written about H-1Bs in the last three and a half years," rightly observed Alex Nowrasteh, an analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, which opposes most restrictions on immigration.

While the Trump Labor Department has taken some positive steps toward reining in a program susceptible to abuse and the target of multiple lawsuits, Trump has softened his stance on H-1B visa reforms in the past.

In August 2018, Politico reported that Trump dined with a group of business leaders, and told them "exactly what it wanted to hear" before telling a staffer to start work on a proposal that would allow top performers "to stay in the country for at least five years on a visa."

What did Trump mean with his tweet? It is hard to know because no White House or administration staffers can or will provide context to president's comment. But for those who fear President Trump is signaling he wants to make an immigration deal to end the shutdown, things grew darker after a speech to the American Farm Bureau Federation convention.

After much tough talk on the need for border security and a physical wall, the president said he wanted to make it "easier" for foreign farm laborers to come – and stay – in the U.S.

"We're actually going to make that actually easier for them to help the farmers, because you actually need these people ... You've had some people come in 20, 25 years, incredible people. Then they go home and can't get back in. This is not going to happen," Trump told the group.

Not only did Trump tell the crowd what they wanted to hear (more foreign labor), he failed to challenge the AFBF's opposition to mandatory E-Verify – the most effective weapon against illegal immigrant labor.

Is President Trump's resolve on border security and worker protections waning? That it is a question that many are asking right now. But it is incumbent upon President Trump or members of his administration to clear up any confusion and to clearly articulate how they intend to keep their promise to American workers.

It was unclear what Trump meant by a "potential path to citizenship" for H-1B visa holders, who already are eligible to be sponsored by their employers for legal permanent residency, which would make them eligible to become U.S. citizens.