



H-1B Visa Halt Will Deter Foreign Students, Experts Say

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A Trump administration order to suspend H-1B, J and other temporary work visas will further deter international students from seeking higher education in the United States, education experts say.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) - an advocacy organization of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and higher education organizations in all 50 states - said they are "deeply" concerned about Monday's presidential proclamation.

"We can't afford to cede ground to international competitors at this critical time," APLU president Peter McPherson said on the association's website. "Suspending new visas in these areas will hamstring our economic recovery and diminish our standing as the world's most innovative economy."

Among the organization's 246 members with significant numbers of foreign students are California Polytechnic State University, University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

H-1B visas cover highly skilled occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent. The suspension affects applicants, not existing visa holders.

J visas include exchange visitors, such as foreign nationals participating in programs as interns, trainees, teachers, camp counselors, au pairs or summer workers.

"We also urge the administration to bolster efforts to keep foreign-born graduates in the United States. We draw the world's brightest minds to our university campuses, and we should make every effort to ensure they make discoveries, start businesses and create jobs in the United States," McPherson said.

President Donald Trump's executive order is intended to protect U.S. workers, the White House said.

But Cato Institute immigration policy analyst David Bier said the order is economically baseless.

"It will hurt the recovery and U.S. workers," Bier said. "Foreign workers create demand for other better jobs for U.S. workers elsewhere in the economy.

"Restricting migration will not lower unemployment, but it will harm American businesses - that are struggling to make it through this period - who employ both Americans and immigrants," he said.

U.S. companies are allowed to employ foreign workers who hold H-1B non-immigrant visas. The holders are allowed to stay in the U.S. for only 60 days without being paid. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shuttered businesses, many H-1B visa holders have lost their jobs and, unlike American workers, don't qualify for unemployment benefits.

Experts say the U.S. technology industry will suffer drastically if H1-B visa holders lose their legal work status in the U.S.

"If the U.S. government really bans H1-B, J-1, etc., the U.S. science will be dead soon, which means the U.S. industry and technology, too," tweeted Yukiko Yamashita, a developmental biologist at the University of Michigan who will move to the Whitehead Laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this fall.

Around "50 percent of my lab members have been immigrants throughout my time as a professor (and if you include second generation of immigrants, number goes up)," wrote Yamashita in an email to VOA. "Many other labs are that way. And professors in my current institute are also 40-50 percent foreign born.

"This country is 'importing' highly educated people to support their science/ technology, and this is not something one can replace by hiring domestic people only. (not enough qualified people)," wrote Yamashita, a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grantee.

"This is yet another example of the unwelcoming message the United States continues to send to prospective students and immigrants around the world," Jill Allen Murray, deputy executive director for public policy of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, wrote to VOA. "While the administration claims that the purpose behind this proclamation is to address the needed economic recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic, these restrictions will have the opposite effect.

"Immigrants in this country create jobs, not take them," Murray wrote.

She added that if the country continues to be unwelcoming, foreign workers "will take their talent, jobs and economic contributions elsewhere."

H-1B workers who are already in the U.S. were not part of this week's proclamation. Foreign students in the U.S. on F-1 visas or arriving in the fall, or students on Optional Practical Training (OPT) visas, were also not included.

But OPT, the program that allows foreign students an extended visa to stay in the U.S. for up to three years after graduation, is also under review. OPT is popular among science, technology, engineering and math students who hope to remain in the country on H-1B visas.

According to a NAFSA: Association of International Educators study, international students at U.S. colleges contribute nearly \$41 billion to the country's economy and support 458,290 jobs.

FWD.us, a political organization founded by tech and business leaders, said on its blog that OPT suspension will force highly educated workers to leave the country.

"This would be a significant mistake that will hurt our economy long term while providing no substantial impact on job or wage growth in the short term," the organization wrote.