

Jobs going abegging with cuts in foreign skilled workers in 2020, could not be filled by Americans: WSJ

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A man exits the transit area after clearing immigration and customs on arrival at Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Virginia, U.S., September 24, 2017. REUTERS/James Lawler Duggan/Files

Despite high unemployment in 2020, companies were not able to fill jobs left open due to Covid-19 and the Trump administration barring entry of foreign skilled workers, says a news report in the Wall Street Journal.

In 2020, and extending into March 2021, the Trump administration put in place a series of bans on foreign skilled workers through the year (April, June, and December) restricting H-1B and other work visas, except for farm workers.

The preliminary finding for 2020, the Journal noted was that “Even with skyrocketing U.S. unemployment, businesses that relied on foreign workers and were able to remain open during the pandemic struggled to fill jobs, employers said,” the Journal reported Feb. 15, 2021, the result of a study by the libertarian Cato Institute think tank.

The Journal quotes a Cato expert, Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies, whose research shows unemployed workers in the U.S. were not interested in jobs held by foreign workers hired at the lower end and seasonal jobs market; and spots vacated with the visa ban on high-skilled foreigners could not be filled because U.S. workers were unqualified for those “specialized jobs at the higher end.”

The foreign worker visa programs (H-1B, H-4, L-1, etc.) form only a very small part of the overall immigration picture, the WSJ notes, “Still the sudden absence of that pipeline revealed how such workers have become embedded in certain parts of the U.S. economy, and may provide useful lessons.”

The 2020 Covid-19 year was without planning it, an experiment in not having, or having fewer, foreign skilled workers and seeing if those jobs left unfilled would be taken by Americans as some anti-immigrant thinkers believe they were jobs being taken away from citizens.

“Since June, enterprises that managed to keep going through the pandemic—from web developers to resorts—say they haven’t been able to find the workers they need. Many scaled back production, cut hours or sent jobs overseas,” the Journal said.

While organizations on the left (Economic Policy Institute) and right (Center for Immigration Policy) want less foreign workers to fill jobs and call for raising wages to attract home-grown

workers, scores of trades associations and pro-immigration groups have urged the Biden administration to reverse the Trump ban on foreign workers, and cuts on H-1B.

According to data presented by the Journal, there has been a dramatic reduction in some of the most popular visas – eg. H-1B visas which go mostly to Indian immigrants, were down 94 percent in the June to December period in 2020, from what they were in 2019; L1 visas were down 95 percent; and “the seven most popular categories of student and work related visas were down 89 percent.