Trump Backs Bill to Cut Legal Immigration in Half

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August 2, 2017

President Donald Trump on Wednesday endorsed a proposal to dramatically reduce legal immigration in an effort to shift away from low-skilled immigration to migrants with the abilities and education to succeed in a modern economy.

At the White House on Wednesday morning, Trump unveiled the latest version of the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment (RAISE) Act, originally **_offered by Sens. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and David Perdue (R-Ga.)_** in February.

The bill would establish a point-based system that gives priority to immigrants with skills, education, and the ability to speak English. It would maintain the ability of immigrants to sponsor their immediate families — spouses and minor children — but not extended family members, as is now the case. In addition, the bill would eliminate the **_diversity visa lottery_**, which awards about 50,000 green cards every year to applicants chosen at random from around the world. Additionally, it would cap refugee resettlements at 50,000 per year.

Eventually, the law would cut the number of legal immigrants coming into the country each year in half — from about 1.1 million to about 550,000.

"As a candidate, I campaigned on creating a merit-based immigration system that protects U.S. workers and taxpayers, and that is why we are here today," Trump said at a news conference with Cotton and Perdue. "Merit-based."

The president argued that the bill would reduce poverty, increase wages, and save billions of dollars in government assistance programs. He said the country for years has favored low-skilled immigration.

"This policy has placed substantial pressure on American workers, taxpayers, and community resources," he said. "Among those hit the hardest in recent years have been immigrants, and very importantly, minorities competing for jobs against brand-new arrivals. And it has not been fair to our people, to our citizens, to our workers."

Some experts argue that reducing low-skilled immigration would do little to increase wages for Americans at the bottom of the economic ladder. In reviewing the proposal in February, an expert at the libertarian Cato Institute pointed to the 1964 elimination of the Bracero program for Mexican farm workers. Studies show wages largely were unaffected.

"Instead of hiring more American workers or raising their wages, farmers turned to machines and altered the crops they planted to take account of the new dearth of workers," wrote Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the think tank. "Instead of planting crops that required labor-intensive harvesting or care, they planted other crops that required many fewer workers. Farmers turned to machines like tomato pickers and changed methods for planting and harvesting other crops to take account of the newer wages they would have faced had they stuck with the Bracero-era farm techniques."

But Cotton and Perdue both argued Wednesday that their bill would give preference to the kinds of immigrants best equipped to contribute to the country's economy and assimilate into the culture. Cotton said the goal of immigration should be to help grow the economy, create jobs, and raise wages for American workers.

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"Our current system simply doesn't do that," he said. "It's over a half-century old. It is an obsolete disaster. And it's time for it to change."

Cotton noted that America absorbs an immigrant population roughly equal to the state of Montana every single year, but only one in 15 of those newcomers has the job skills and abilities to succeed.

"We also lose out on the very best talent coming to our country, the most ultra high-skilled immigrants who can come here and bring their entrepreneurial spirit and their innovative capabilities," he said.

Perdue said he and Cotton studied "best practices" and modeled their proposal on the immigration polices of Canada and Australia.

"Nothing that we're going to do is more important than this in terms of growing our economy," he said. "The reason we need to do is this very simple. Our current system does not work. It keeps America from being competitive, and it does not meet the needs of our economy today."

The proposal won the strong praise of several organizations that have long advocated for lower levels of immigration. NumbersUSA President Roy Beck in December went as far as to say that the incoming president's first term ***would be a failure*** if he was not able to persuade Congress to end chain migration.

"Our recent polling confirms that American voters overwhelmingly want far less immigration because they know mass immigration creates unfair competition for American workers," Beck said in a prepared statement Wednesday. "Seeing the president standing with the bill's sponsors at the White House gives hope to the tens of millions of struggling Americans in stagnant jobs or outside the labor market altogether."

Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said in a statement that the bill would bring America's immigration system into the 21st century.

"Nothing underscores the failure of our current immigration system like the constant clamoring from the business sector for more 'skilled' workers, while we import over one million immigrants each and every year, with nearly one-quarter lacking even a high school diploma," he stated.

Dave Ray, a spokesman for the organization, added in an interview with LifeZette: "President Trump promised to make America great again. The RAISE Act goes a long way to making immigration great again, as well."