



A commonsense fix for our broken immigration system

By Orrin G. Hatch and Ben McAdams | Saturday, July 13, 2019

America remains polarized on many issues, but both sides agree on one thing: Our high-skilled immigration system is broken. The good news? Congress is taking important steps to fix it.

Current law heavily restricts the number of high-skilled immigrants who can enter our country each year. These are immigrants with advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science — in other words, men and women who add tremendous value to our economy and who are highly sought after by U.S. employers. The law, as it is currently written, allows high-skilled immigrants to live and work permanently in the United States with a green card but severely limits how many of these green cards are available. In fact, only 7% of the total number of employment-based green cards available each year can be allotted to high-skilled applicants from any one country. As a result, immigrants from countries with large populations have significantly longer wait times than do immigrants from smaller countries.

These per-country quotas force high-skilled immigrants already living here to wait several years to receive their green cards. To make matters worse, the immigration status of their families is kept in limbo, resulting in months and even years of family separation. Immigrant parents who can only get temporary visas for their children are forced to choose between sending their children home while waiting or returning home themselves.

Not surprisingly, many give up in frustration and move to countries with more modern and more welcoming immigration systems, such as Canada. And therein lies the problem. Our outdated immigration laws give an upper edge to some of our closest economic competitors. We train and educate tens of thousands of exceptionally talented professionals just to force them to leave later. And who benefits from this backwards system? Foreign countries who will accept these American-educated immigrants with open arms.

The United States should accept talented individuals who want to work hard and contribute to our economy, no matter their country of origin. That's why the Orrin G. Hatch Foundation, in collaboration with FWD.us — a bipartisan group of business and tech leaders — recently released a [report](#) on the long-overdue need for high-skilled immigration reform. The report demonstrates how immigrants invigorate the U.S. economy and strengthen our communities, improving innovation and global competitiveness along the way. It offers our elected officials a

blueprint for bipartisan immigration that builds on Sen. Hatch's leadership in Congress – leadership that has led to an important breakthrough.

Last week, the House of Representatives passed the Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act of 2019, which directly addresses the most significant problems in our high-skilled immigration system. Specifically, this bill eliminates the per-country cap on employment-based green cards. It also increases the cap on family-based green cards from 7 percent to 15 percent in a given year.

If this bill is enacted into law, changes would take effect beginning Oct. 1. Importantly, this legislation would expand opportunities for foreign workers with advanced degrees or exceptional ability and for investors creating jobs in the United States. With more than 300 bipartisan cosponsors in the House, we are confident that this legislation can also pass in the Senate.

We hope that Congress can now capitalize on this momentum by addressing other critical aspects of the immigration debate so that we can maintain a welcoming immigration system that continues to attract the best and brightest in the world. Despite the contentiousness of the immigration debate, we see passage of this bill as real progress. Utahns should be encouraged that a reasonable and humane approach to fixing our broken immigration system prevailed with overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle.

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