

PUBLICATION

RAISE Act Proposal Likely to Thud

Authors: Robert C. Divine

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President Trump's endorsement yesterday of a bill proposed by two senators (the RAISE Act) tends to make people think that it has more likelihood of becoming law than it does. The President does not make laws alone or with a few legislators. This is mainly political posturing, so if you have a stake in the current system don't get too worried about it. But if you are a U.S. voter or company, you should let your senators and congressman know what you think.

We rarely comment about legislative proposals about immigration, because there are so many of them with little chance of being enacted. The RAISE Act, introduced on August 2, 2017, by Republican Senators Cotton and Perdue, is another such bill, but because President Trump publicly endorsed it on the same day, it has the appearance of a serious, coordinated effort with legs.

The RAISE Act (Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy Act) would eliminate the current system balancing family, employment, diversity and refugee based permanent immigration. It would:

- Replace the current employment based categories for 140,000 slots (including family) with a "merit-based" point system weighted toward:
 - ages 26-30 or close to it;
 - higher education favoring STEM fields and U.S. institutions;
 - high English language proficiency;
 - extraordinary achievement in science or sports;
 - offers of employment with high compensation;
 - investment and active management in new U.S. businesses; and
 - with reduction for marriage to a spouse with low points.
- Limit family-based immigration to spouses and unmarried children of citizens and permanent residents, with a total limit of 88,000, while parents of adult citizens would be eligible only for new "W" temporary visas for five years at a time.
- Eliminate the "diversity" lottery-based category.
- Limit refugees to 50,000 per year.
- On the whole, essentially cut current permanent immigration levels in half.
- Not change temporary visas, but hordes of H-1B workers who are beyond the normal limit of six years because they are waiting for green cards under the current system would seem to lose status almost immediately.

This proposal represents well the views of a vocal minority of the American public who are among those who supported President Trump's election. But the current system represents decades of careful national negotiation toward an ambivalent consensus, and the RAISE Act is unlikely to muster enough votes to upset that consensus.

The RAISE Act proposal will spur a healthy national discussion about the benefits and values of immigration from various viewpoints. Proponents of the bill will reflect understandable fears of U.S. workers about

seemingly endless waves of new workforce competitors and a dilution of national identity. Opponents of the bill will emphasize the economic contribution of lower-skilled immigrants and of the importance of family, protection and diversity. Business interests will express preference for needed special skills over generally educated people as well as the need for more workers in general, not less. Economists will cite competing studies concerning the economic contributions and costs of new immigrants and how they balance.

The end result of the debate is not likely to be enactment of the RAISE Act. There is some chance that the 50,000 "diversity" visas given out by lottery each year will be shifted to some new category of merit- or investment-based immigration. Other tweaks are possible. But not likely in this bill, despite President Trump's support.