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TRUMP CALLS FOR THE END TO VISA LOTTERY SYSTEM IN WAKE OF TERROR ATTACK

Program awards 50,000 green cards to foreigners each year

By Alicia A. Caldwell and Laura Meckler
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President Donald Trump called for an end to the visa lottery program that brought to the U.S. the driver of a rental truck who **plowed into pedestrians and cyclists in New York**.

Officials said the suspect, **29-year-old Sayfullo Saipov**, was admitted to the U.S. through the diversity lottery program, which randomly awards 50,000 green cards to foreigners each year. Mr. Trump has proposed ending the program before and reiterated his views in the wake of the attack, which **killed eight people** and injured 11 others.

"I am going to ask Congress to immediately initiate work to get rid of this program," Mr. Trump said from the White House on Wednesday. "It sounds nice. It's not nice. It's not good."

Mr. Trump also expressed sympathy for the victims and called the attack a horrible act and the driver an animal. He said he was considering sending the attacker to the U.S. terrorism detention center at Guantanamo Bay. "Send him to Gitmo," he said.

Mr. Saipov came to the U.S. from Uzbekistan in 2010 through the diversity lottery program, the Department of Homeland Security said. He is a legal permanent resident, according to New York City police, meaning he would have been eligible to apply for citizenship.

Republicans have long tried to end the program. Democrats generally support the lottery as a way to ensure diversity among immigrants to the U.S., but they have been willing to see it go as part of a larger, comprehensive immigration bill.

In 2007 and 2013, broad-based overhaul bills included provisions to kill the diversity lottery and use those visas for a merit-based system, but both measures died amid Republican opposition. GOP efforts to end the lottery program without making other changes to the immigration system have also languished.

Writing on Twitter early Wednesday, Mr. Trump called the program "a Chuck Schumer beauty," though the New York Democrat wasn't a cosponsor as a member of the House of Representatives when it was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990.

The Immigration Act had bipartisan support and was cosponsored in the Senate by Republicans Alan Simpson of Wyoming and Alfonse D'Amato of New York, along with Democrats Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and Christopher Dodd of Connecticut. The late Sen. Ted Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, was an original sponsor of the program.

As a senator, Mr. Schumer has supported the program as a way to ensure that immigration doesn't come from just a handful of countries whose citizens wind up qualifying through standard means.

"I have always believed and continue to believe that immigration is good for America," Sen. Schumer said Wednesday morning. "President Trump, instead of politicizing and dividing America, which he always seems to do at times of national tragedy, should be focusing on the real solution – antiterrorism funding – which he proposed cutting in his most recent budget."

A Republican proposal backed by Mr. Trump this year called the Raise Act would reduce total legal immigration to the U.S., in part by eliminating the diversity lottery. Many Democrats have been open to ending the program but they want to retain the visas for use in another way.

Mr. Trump has been a proponent of curbing legal immigration, including reducing the number of foreigners who can come to the U.S. strictly based on family ties in the U.S.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday morning that the last thing the president or anybody else should do is politicize this tragedy. He said the focus should be on finding out what motivated the attacker.

"That is what we should be focused on. The last thing we should do is be casting aspersions on whole races of people, whole religions," he told CNN, noting that anyone who seeks to immigrate to the U.S. should be thoroughly vetted.

The Diversity Lottery was created as part of the 1990 Immigration Act and intended to encourage immigration from countries with lower rates of immigration to the U.S.

Under the Diversity program, 50,000 visas are available to foreigners each year from nearly any country, with countries with high rates of immigration to the U.S. as exceptions.

About 100,000 winners are selected each year by the State Department to ensure that 50,000 eligible immigrants can be approved for the program.

Winners are allowed to move to the U.S., often with their immediate family, and are immediately eligible for a green card and can eventually apply for citizenship.

Though the program doesn't require that visa winners have ties to the U.S. or have specific skills, they are required to have a high school diploma and at least two years of experience in a job that requires at least two years of training or experience.

Visa winners are subject to the same background checks, including with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, as any other foreigner asking to come to the U.S.

Millions of people apply for the program every year and any one country is limited to 7 percent of the total visas given out.

Just over 4,000 people from Uzbekistan won the diversity lottery for the 2010 budget year, according to State Department statistics. That same year, 3,198 people from the Central Asian nation, a former Soviet republic, became legal permanent residents in the U.S. under the diversity visa lottery, according to government data.

– *Rebecca Ballhaus contributed to this article.*