

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

TRUMP EXPECTED TO BOLSTER 'BUY AMERICAN' AND 'HIRE AMERICAN' DIRECTIVES

President to sign executive order calling for government-wide review to strengthen mandates

By Eli Stokols
April 17, 2017

President Donald Trump will sign an executive order in Wisconsin on Tuesday directing a government-wide review aimed at putting new teeth back into decades-old "Buy American" and "Hire American" directives.

The 220-day review process, which could lead to additional executive orders and possibly legislation, will focus on preventing [foreign workers with H-1B visas](#) from, as one senior administration official put it, "undercutting American labor at less cost," which the official labeled as "an abuse" of the current system.

"This is a clear statement from the president of the United States to shore up some of these abuses," the official continued. The goal, the official said, is ensuring that "everyone can have a realistic path to economic success and full employment."

For the past several years, the government has used a lottery to distribute 85,000 visas for high-skilled foreign workers. It is a program popular with the technology industry, and one that critics say displaces U.S. workers and can depress salaries.

The order will call for a review by federal agencies aimed at stricter enforcement of immigration and other laws governing the entry of workers into the U.S.

In addition to the visa program, federal agencies will be asked to review and minimize the use of waivers and exceptions to Buy American policies as well as assess the degree to which waivers included in free-trade agreements have hurt American workers.

If those waivers, which are part of trade agreements with nearly 60 countries, are deemed to have put the U.S. at a disadvantage, as administration officials believe to be the case, those deals are likely to be renegotiated, the official said.

The order also will demand the use of [American-made steel](#) in publicly financed infrastructure and other construction projects. It clarifies that steel slab imported from and primarily constructed in foreign countries but finished in the U.S. won't meet that directive.

"This ensures that the benefits of Buy American are felt throughout the supply chain," another senior administration official said on Monday.

Criticizing past administrations for allowing the dilution of government mandates created to prioritize American workers and products in taxpayer-financed projects, the Trump officials said their policies are the result of conversations with labor groups, large-scale

manufacturers and an American public that has demonstrated broad support for a more narrowly defined “Buy American” framework.

The White House touted broad public support for the directives, pointing to a November 2016 poll by the Mellman Group showing 74 percent of respondents supporting the use of American workers and materials in publicly financed products.

The changes will take some time to implement, the second official acknowledged. Mr. Trump is planning to unveil the new push on Tuesday at [Snap-On Tools](#) headquarters in Kenosha, Wis. His remarks there are expected to send a strong message that the president is serious on following through on campaign promises related to reinvigorating U.S. manufacturing.

“The culture immediately changes across the agencies,” the officials said.