



STATEMENT

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NO VIRGINIA, IT'S NOT THE THIRD RAIL

In a rare show of bipartisan unity, the House voted Tuesday to pass legislation making it easier for highly skilled immigrants from India and China to stay and work in the U.S.

H.R. 3012, the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act, phases out quotas on the number of legal permanent residents who can be admitted in any given year from a single country. Introduced by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) and House Judiciary chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX), the bill was cosponsored by a broad bipartisan group, including influential Democrats, Rep. Zoe Lofgren (CA) and Rep. Luis Gutierrez (IL). It was approved by a vote of 389 to 15 and is now expected to be taken up by the Senate.

ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby made the following statement:

Just when we thought Congress would never act to repair the nation's broken immigration system, the House has made a critical breakthrough – voting overwhelmingly to approve an important fix that will make American companies more competitive and the immigration system fairer and more welcoming.

The per country caps that would be phased out by this legislation are among the most absurd and cumbersome features of the immigration system. As is, thousands of foreigners are approved each year to enter the country as legal permanent residents, some sponsored by employers who need their skills, others by family members who have become citizens. But that approval is not enough to get a visa. Instead, approved candidates get in line and wait for their number to come up under the annual cap for their country. And because until now, visas were allotted equally to all countries, no matter how big or small, candidates from big countries with strong ties to the U.S. often waited years – workers from India, for example, are now waiting 70 years, family members from Mexico more than a decade.

Phasing out the caps will dramatically reduce waits for the highly skilled workers America needs to remain a globally competitive knowledge economy. Not all nations will benefit: skilled workers from relatively small countries like South Korea will still face backlogs. But American companies will find it easier to hire researchers, engineers and other top talent. The U.S. will become a more attractive destination for foreign innovators and entrepreneurs. And they in turn will help create jobs for Americans – a much needed boost for economic recovery.

Yesterday's vote also makes an important point about the politics of immigration. Immigration is not a third rail – certainly, it doesn't have to be. Democrats and Republicans can find common ground. All Americans, no matter what their views about illegal immigrants, have a stake in fixing the legal immigration system. The conventional wisdom of the past – that small steps were a mistake, better to fix everything all at once with a comprehensive bill – was wrong.

The House has taken a first, important step: a simple, surgical fix that will make a big difference. Now it's the Senate's turn. And who knows – success could even pave the way for more steps.

**IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at
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ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of business owners advocating immigration reform. The organization links major corporations, trade associations and 25 state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized employers working to advance better immigration law. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.