

How Unlimited Visas Could Affect Immigration

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An immigration bill ready to be rolled out by a group of Democrats and Republicans in the Senate will remove the ceiling from several visa categories, meaning that there will be no limit on the number of immigrants who can come to the U.S. on those visas each year.

How will that impact who can and cannot immigrate to America? Let's look at some of the categories.

1. Family Right now, the only category of family-based visas without an annual limit is for the immediate family of a U.S. citizen, which is defined as a spouse, a child under the age of 21, or a parent.

The Senate bill will expand the definition of immediate family to allow more permanent residents -- people with green cards -- to bring their spouses and children to the U.S.

That could have a big impact on future immigrants, and possibly on those waiting in line, depending on how the change is enacted.

Under the current system, permanent residents can apply for green cards for their spouses and children, but there's an annual cap on how many can be awarded. There are [88,000](#) of those visas available each year, and they're in demand, according to Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration law professor at Cornell University Law School. There's currently a two-year backlog for those applicants.

The change means that green-card holders will have a much quicker way to bring their immediate family to U.S.

Since the immigration bill as whole is trying to bring in more highly-skilled immigrants, this adjustment fits that mindset: a worker will not only be able to come here to work, they'll be able to bring their spouses and children, too. That makes moving to another country a lot more appealing.

At the same time, there will be cutbacks to other family visas. The Senate bill will eliminate visas for married children over the age of 31 and siblings of U.S. citizens.

"Potentially that might have a downside in terms of making immigration to the United States less attractive," said Howard Chang, an immigration professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. "Because you have to leave siblings and adult sons and daughters behind in your home countries."

2. Extraordinary Immigrants The legislation will remove the visa limit on "aliens of extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business or athletics," according to an outline of the bill obtained by Univision. It will also remove the cap on top-tier professors, researchers and multinational executives.

Will that mean a sudden influx of Olympians and musicians from around the world? Probably not.

The current system has a limit of 40,000 of these types of visas per year, and it hasn't been meeting that cap. The reason: the criteria is stringent (just ask this [Iranian tennis table player](#) who was denied a visa, took federal immigration officials to court, and then lost his case last year).

3. PhDs The elimination of the cap for "extraordinary" immigrants could allow more immigrants from another professional sphere to come to the U.S.: doctoral degree holders.

The Senate bill allows PhDs in any field to come to the U.S. in unlimited numbers, presumably if they have an employer to sponsor them.

Previously, PhDs were placed in a different visa category that was subject to limits.

In general, Penn Law Professor Howard Chang thinks allowing more highly skilled immigrants to come to the U.S. is a good thing.

"Certainly in terms of the fiscal impact," Chang said. "The more skilled they are, the higher incomes they'll earn and the more they'll pay in taxes."

http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/Politics/removing-visas-caps-affect-immigration/story?id=18970628