



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

Statement from the Immigration Policy Center

An Immigration Two-Step: House-Senate Conferees on Stimulus Bill Reject Expansion of E-Verify But Limit Foreign Professionals on H-1Bs

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The House-Senate conferees who crafted the final version of the economic stimulus legislation now working its way through Congress faced considerable pressure to include immigration-related measures that are long on rhetoric and short on results. Two issues receiving substantial attention in the debate are the "E-Verify" system (a federal, web-based, employment-verification pilot program) and the H-1B visa program for foreign professionals. Based on the final provisions in the bill, the conferees deserve both credit and criticism.

E-Verify

It appears that the conferees have wisely resisted rapid-fire expansion of the E-Verify program. As a new [fact sheet](#) from the IPC explains, those who claim that E-Verify is the solution ignore the fact that the program does not effectively root out undocumented workers, harms American workers who will be ensnared by database errors, and forces American businesses to bare additional costs associated with the program. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce concluded that a federal rule that would have similarly expanded E-Verify would result in net societal costs of [\\$10 billion a year](#). Small businesses - which employ approximately 50% of the U.S. workforce - would be disproportionately affected. At a time when the U.S. economy is sinking deeper into recession and the ranks of the unemployed are growing with every passing day, expanding E-Verify before improving it would have been a costly and chaotic mistake.

H-1B

Another immigration-related issue in the stimulus debate revolved around the [H-1B program](#). It appears that anyone receiving TARP money will be hard pressed to hire foreign nationals for at least a two-year period. We can all agree on the importance of protecting American workers. Our immigration system can and should be an asset in that effort. However, protectionist-oriented policies will thwart progress and innovation in the U.S. and will hurt American workers in the long run. *New York Times* op-ed columnist [Thomas L. Friedman](#) opined on this action and its impact on the economy: "Protectionism did not cause the Great Depression, but it sure helped to make it 'Great'." As he notes, "in an age when attracting the first-round intellectual draft choices from around the world is the most important competitive advantage a knowledge economy can have, why would we add barriers against such brainpower - anywhere?" Additionally, a [recent study](#) on the topic by researchers at the Harvard Business School and the University of Michigan concludes that the H-1B program plays "an important role in U.S. innovation" because of its role in bringing foreign-born scientists and engineers to the United States. The House-Senate conferees may have been aiming to protect U.S. workers, but by limiting access to global brain power they may be squelching just the sort of stimulus America needs.

(more)

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Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Immigration has become the perennial pothole into which Congress drives each and every legislative debate. We urgently need a comprehensive and workable solution to resolve our immigration problems. Until then, this issue will continue to thwart the progress and promise of the new Administration.

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For more analysis on the stimulus bill and other immigration issues read our
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