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# President Trump Proposes New, Merit-Based Immigration System

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As expected, President Trump announced today a proposal to change the U.S. immigration system to a merit-based system. It's no exaggeration to call this an overhaul; if passed into law, it would dramatically reshape the current immigration system in the U.S.

Historically, U.S. immigration law and policy focused on maintaining our identity as a "nation of immigrants." But in early 2018, the Department of Homeland Security made a quiet but significant signal that it was formally stepping away from this identity, revising the stated purpose of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—the main immigration arm of the U.S. government—to remove reference to securing America's promise as a nation of immigrants. Now, the stated purpose of the USCIS includes, instead, a focus on securing "the Homeland."

The message appeared clear at the time: we aren't focused anymore on letting people in; we want to keep them out. Over the period since, immigration policies rapidly and dramatically shifted to implement this new mindset—both within the USCIS and within other agencies of the Department if Homeland Security. "Buy American, Hire American" has played out as " America first, and let's make it ugly for everyone else."

President Trump's newly proposed system could go a long way to support that stance, giving points based on merit—as determined by the U.S. government, based on its priorities. These priorities have come to shift or stick based on a wide variety of non-regulatory or even data-based factors, often putting political priorities on an equal footing with traditional values or even hard data about what and who our country actually needs to remain economically and strategically successful. Unless this newly proposed system allows us to recruit foreign talent to fill critical gaps in the U.S. labor market, it could confound an already immense problem impacting both the U.S. economy and the ultimate success of the U.S. on the world stage. Done right, it could—at the very least—move us in a sustainable direction that might (again, at least) put a much needed cast on a very badly broken system.

The question at issue really is: what is the most effective way to begin the healing process? I, for one, am very eager to see whether any proposal on immigration can even make it through a divided Congress, no matter how effective a solution it might be. If nothing can, the rubber will never hit the road, and we'll remain stalled in a very difficult and precarious position until the problem becomes so overwhelming that the issue itself will force some action. But by then, the most effective solutions might no longer be on the table.



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