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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ: DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: International

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: Times of India

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE : 12/07/2019

US House OKs bill to lift 7% country cap on green cards

Chidanand.Rajghatta
@timesgroup.com

Washington: The US House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a bill that will lift an existing 7% country cap on issuing green cards, overcoming a toxic campaign against India and Indian tech workers by protectionists who believe the new law will help them "steal American jobs".

In a torrid run-up to the vote, right-wing activists mounted a furious campaign to sway lawmakers, drafting

100 REPUBLICANS BACK IT

> Bill creates no new green cards or H-1B visas



> It redistributes the existing green card quota in a more equitable manner

> Current 7% country-specific cap enjoins employers to discriminate against Indian-origin professionals

> Once President approves the bill, Indians stand to benefit more from the law



prominent Trump acolytes such as Fox News' Sean Hannity to lobby against the bill. They warned Republican lawmakers of electoral consequences if they backed it.

But lawmakers ignored the threat and passed the bill by an overwhelming 365-65 margin.

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Desis seeking green card gain most from cap removal

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The bill had the backing of nearly 100 Republican legislators, making it a bipartisan effort in the Democrat-controlled House. A similar bill is currently in the Senate, and after that is passed, a reconciled version has to be sent to the president, upon whose signature it becomes law.

If and when that happens, the new law will remove the 7% per country limit on green cards that has long constrained more than 3,00,000 Indian tech workers in US, who wait for a decade or more in what is termed the "H1B limbo", unable to change jobs or plan their future as they await permanent residency. It will also raise the limit on family-based Green Cards from 7% to 15%.

India and skilled Indian workers have been identified as potentially the biggest "beneficiaries" of the change in law because they constitute the largest group of foreign professionals waiting for permanent residency, and a path to citizenship, which is granted by the green card. While supporters of the bill argue that the only thing this bill does is to ensure that all new applicants will wait the exact same time for a green card, regardless of country of birth, opponents maintain that the change in law will boost Indians, who happen to constitute the biggest educated and skilled foreign work force in the US.

In fact, according to some experts, the bill actually ma-



The bill now needs the approval of the Senate and then the president to come into effect

kes the green card process compliant with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a federal law that prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, colour, national origin and religion. With its 7% country-specific cap, current law actively enjoins employers to discriminate against professionals of Indian origin.

"Nation-based quotas are governmental discrimination that is every bit as useless — if not as malicious — as racial discrimination. (There is) no moral reason to treat people differently based on their nationality," maintained Leon Fresco, a former congressional staff member who has been actively pressing for a change in law, while pointing out that the bill creates no new green cards and no new H-1B visas, and therefore should not worry protectionists. It simply redistributes the existing green card quota in a more equitable manner so large nations and their big tech worker pools, which the US needs

and which contribute solely to the US economy, discriminated against.

But American protectionists believe that H-1B, formally titled Fair and Equitable Treatment of High-Skilled Immigrants of 2019, is anything but fair to American workers. They argue that removing the country cap, which excludes Icelanders and Indians, can get as many green cards as Indians even though the Indian worker pool is larger, will simply result in Americans overrunning the market at the expense of native-born Americans and workers from smaller countries.

Some of the critics, reporting this argument as borderline racist, have headlined "House today vote on green card way to 300,000 Indian contract workers" while wing Breitbart Nationally singled out the beneficiaries of the law (which still needs approval and presidential signature to come into effect). "The bill would cut track to green card Indian contract workers have backlogged card waiting line would also aid the family members in it," itbert argued, while "the promise of cards — and citizenship — for help so encourage Indian graduates from American green card Full report