



How Many Immigrants Would Be Impacted by the Trump Executive Order?

By Matt O'Brien | April 2020

The Trump Administration has announced that it plans to implement a 60 day pause in immigration to the United States to help halt the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the U.S. economy when so many people are currently out of work due to social distancing measures.

The contours of this program are not yet fully known. Predictably, the mainstream media coverage has focused on potential inconvenience to foreign nationals who wish to immigrate here. That commentary has been accompanied by wildly divergent estimates regarding how many foreign nationals might be affected.

Depending on how the moratorium is implemented the number of green card applications that are ultimately impacted could range anywhere from roughly 5,000-80,000. However, even using the high-end estimate that's less than one percent of the one million people granted lawful permanent residence in the U.S. each year. And this is only a temporary delay in the review and adjudication of those applications. In the near future, the U.S. will again begin issuing green cards.

There is a larger number of temporary visa applicants who could be nominally affected by any pause in the review and adjudication of immigration applications. However, since air, land and marine travel across U.S. borders is virtually shut down anyway, it's difficult to say whether these folks will even notice a temporary pause in the processing of their visa applications.

While the U.S. government must be sensitive to the concerns of American citizens who have foreign family members, the foremost duty of the President of the United States is to protect the American public from all enemies foreign and domestic. That solemn responsibility must be fulfilled in the face of invading foreign microbes just as assiduously as it would be in the face of foreign terrorists or enemy military forces.

On balance, temporarily imposing a minor inconvenience on a small cohort of foreign citizens, in order to further ensure public health and protect American workers, seems to constitute a rational and reasonable protective measure in a time when the entire world is battling a previously unknown virus whose attributes are not yet well understood.