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The Republican case for a Temporary Family Visitation Visa

BY RICK TAFT AND FOROUGH HOSSEINI, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS - 10/24/22 6:30 PM ET

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It is no surprise that the Temporary Family Visitation Visa is gathering strong Republican congressional support. In fact, 18 of 43 cosponsors in the House are Republican and, in the upper chamber, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has partnered with Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) on the legislation. The reason is simple: The bill aligns with key elements of the GOP agenda.

The TFVA, which would create a new nonimmigrant visa for foreign nationals who wish to visit family members in the U.S., would correct a major and obvious failure of the visa system in a way that would strengthen our economy and reduce the number of people applying for immigrant visas. It can also be seen as a way for Republicans to thread the needle on immigration reform as the bill would help Americans with an immigrant background (a growing Republican constituency including Hispanics and Asians who tend to hold conservative social values) without fostering additional immigration (a key objective for the party's base).

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The constituent parts of this legislation bear up under scrutiny.

The TFVA is clearly a constructive bipartisan measure aimed at responsibly cleaning up a mess that can perversely turn a simple request to visit family in the U.S. into years of frustration resulting in the unintended consequence of driving up green card applications.

At present, foreign nationals from countries not included in the Visa Waiver Program, who have no intention to immigrate, are routinely denied tourist visas when they simply want to visit relatives. They are caught in a catch-22 in which strong family ties that give an

resident) relatives, who wish to either tour the United States or visit their U.S.-based relatives, are often denied nonimmigrant visas to visit. The presumption of intention to immigrate is stated explicitly in Section 214(b) of the [Immigration and Nationality Act], and is the most common basis for rejecting nonimmigrant visa applicants."



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The TFVA, which has strict accountability measures and safeguards against visa overstays, would give these relatives of U.S. citizens and LPRs a pathway to visit family in the U.S., and would give their U.S. citizen and LPR relatives an opportunity to retain and strengthen family ties (a core Republican value). The TFVA would give these families the opportunity to gather for such landmark occasions as graduations, weddings and family reunions. Or, sadly, for an ailing or dying loved one.

While this population of potential visitors has no intention to immigrate, if they are repeatedly denied a tourist visa a green card can be their only option for visiting loved ones in the United States. Green card applications from this population further stress a system severely backlogged with roughly 400,000 cases, causing applicant wait times of up to 10 years. Passage of the TFVA would divert these green card applicants to a nonimmigrant visa that accurately reflects their intent and free up resources to help restore order to an overburdened system. Reducing the pool of green card applicants would have the systemic effect of reducing the number of potential immigrants.

million people estimated to take advantage of the TFVA annually, that's more than \$4 billion a year in additional travel spending. Such a boost in tourist spending could lead to the creation of thousands of jobs.

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Beyond the benefits enumerated above, the TFVA merits more Republican support because it can help Republicans at the polls. According to a Gallup poll conducted in July, the portion of Americans who see immigration as a good thing for the country has steadily grown over the last 20 years — from 52 percent in 2002 to 70 percent today. Moreover, the poll found that 75 percent of independent voters (a key group when it comes to winning federal elections) also view immigration positively. Republican support of the TFVA can signal to these voters a compassion for Americans with immigrant backgrounds. More broadly, the TFVA could serve as a model for a new Republican approach to immigration: respect and strengthen family ties for law-abiding Americans with immigrant backgrounds, clean up the family visa morass, decrease green card applications, and boost the U.S. economy — all this without jeopardizing Republican positions on border security, immigrant labor and immigration limits.

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