

New US Bill seeks to end optional practical training

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Pune: A Republican congressman plans to introduce a bill that seeks to end the optional practical training (OPT), a programme in the US, designed to be a pathway for students seeking technology jobs in the US. The Federal-funded programme is a stepping stone for students looking to get H-1B visas to work in the US.



In the recent years, the number of OPTs granted has surpassed the number of H-1B visas. Republican [Paul Gosar](#) said on Friday that he intends to introduce 'Fairness for High-skilled Americans Act of 2019' to the house of representatives within two weeks. Most people expect stiff opposition for the act and have little chance of success.

According to a report by Pew Research Center, OPT has overtaken the H-1B visa as the largest source of new temporary high skilled immigrant workers.

In 2017, a record 2,76,500 foreign graduates received work permits under the OPT programme, up from 2,57,100 in 2016, as per data from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, obtained through a public records request. In contrast, the H-1B visa has a total cap of 80,000 fresh visas annually. Indians were the biggest beneficiaries of this programme, receiving 2,87,600 OPT approvals between 2015 and 2017.

Under the current rules, a student on a F1 visa can stay on and work in the US for 12 months after graduation. A government decision in 2008 increased the duration to 36 months for STEM (science, technology and math) students.

According to the Pew report, the number of students under the OPT programme has increased by 400% in the past decade, following this amendment. Close to 1.5 million foreign students were granted an OPT between 2004-2016, with over half of them working in STEM fields.

“A bill that proposes to take away over a quarter of a million temporary positions, primarily in STEM, makes little sense in an economy that has less than 4% unemployment,” says Rajiv S Khanna, managing attorney at immigration law company Immigration.com.