

are committed to practicing medicine for 3 years in areas having a shortage of health care professionals. This program has been very successful, and Congress has extended the waiver on multiple occasions.

This waiver's current authorization expires this Friday. The gentlelady from California, with this legislation, reauthorizes the waiver until September 30, 2009, the end of the fiscal year.

This bill also extends the authorization for certain religious worker immigrant visas. The Immigration and Nationality Act makes available green cards each year to special immigrant religious workers. This program allows religious denominations in the United States to bring in needed religious workers—both ministers and those working in religious occupations or vocations—so long as the workers have been performing those functions for at least 2 previous years.

The non-minister categories were added by the 1990 immigration bill, and Congress has extended their authorization several times since then. However, the authorization also expires this Friday. This bill extends the program through September 30, 2009, the end of the fiscal year. These visas assist many American religious denominations to meet the needs of their followers.

Because this bill reauthorizes two worthy immigration programs, I urge my colleagues to support this.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, I would now yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK).

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I regret that I must stand in opposition to allowing immigration extensions or reforms without addressing a temporary extension of the H-2B returning worker program.

The H-2B visa program was created to provide access to nonimmigrant, temporary workers for seasonal and peak load needs when no American workers can be found. Foreign workers offer small and seasonal businesses short-term help, and they return to their home countries at the end of the season. H-2B visas are capped at 66,000 visas per year. Even with 66,000 visas per year, it does not meet the labor needs of seasonal businesses.

To help fill these needs, Congress established the H-2B returning worker program in 2005. This program exempts returning workers who have received an H-2B visa in one of three previous fiscal years from counting against the 66,000 cap. However, this exemption expired on September 30, 2007. In the 110th Congress, this exemption had the support of 158 bipartisan Members of Congress—88 Democrats and 70 Republicans. In the 111th Congress, the bill has just been introduced, and we already have the support of 32 Democrats and 23 Republicans. As of January 7, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services had already received enough

visa petitions to exceed the cap for H-2B visas for the second half of this fiscal year.

This demand highlights the immediate need for Congress to extend the H-2B visa returning worker program to help small and seasonal businesses fill their seasonal labor needs and to keep full-time Americans and businesses working. These returning workers have provided relief to small businesses throughout the Nation, covering a broad spectrum of industries like landscapers, tourism, restaurants, hotels, and seafood processors.

H-2B workers offer short-term help. They cannot and do not stay in the United States. More importantly, the H-2B program contains strong provisions to ensure American workers have the first chance to work.

Without an extension of the returning worker program, small and seasonal businesses will face significant labor shortages this year as they did last year. We have constantly been told we cannot bring this bill to the floor until we address comprehensive immigration. Then why are we bringing up the J-1 program when we're letting H-2B expire?

Therefore, regrettably, I must oppose H.R. 1127.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee (Mr. SMITH of Texas).

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 1127, but I also agree with STEVE KING, the ranking member of the immigration subcommittee, about the need for religious worker reciprocity. Some countries that send religious workers to the United States refuse entry to religious workers from the United States and do not allow for the free exercise of religion.

Each year, the U.S. Commission of International Religious Freedom compiles a list of countries that seek to control religious thought and expression, that show open hostility to religious minorities and that fail to protect certain religious groups. The 2008 list includes Burma, North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

One way to help advance religious freedom is to do as Representative KING suggests and prevent citizens of countries that are hostile to religious freedom from participating in our religious worker visa program. Both the Special Immigrant Non-Minister Religious Worker Program and the rural J-1 visa waiver program are set to expire this Friday, March 6. H.R. 1127 extends both programs until September 30, 2009.

The J-1 visa program provision waives the 2-year foreign residency requirement for foreign doctors who are willing to serve in medically underserved areas. The waiver program enables people in rural and in intercity communities to have access to quality medical care. The Special Immigrant Non-Minister Religious Worker Program allows 5,000 religious workers per

year to enter the United States to assist churches and other religious establishments.

While I support the program, I have long been concerned about the level of fraud. In 2006, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office conducted an assessment on the religious worker visa program. They selected 220 religious workers at random and found fraud in one-third of the cases. In addition, they found "many of the cases reviewed had multiple fraud indicators." In 32 of the fraudulent cases, the religious institution was not bona fide. It either did not exist or it existed only on paper. Thirty-nine of the fraudulent cases were marked by fraudulent supporting documentation or material misrepresentations within a document by a legitimate religious institution.

The Department of Homeland Security issued a final rule last November, making several changes designed to reduce fraud in the program. Immigration Chairwoman LOFGREN and I are awaiting a report by the DHS inspector general regarding the effectiveness of those fraud prevention measures. I hope we will address concerns about fraud and will also ensure that reciprocity is contained in any future extension of the religious worker visa program.

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY).

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I am rising in support of this legislation, and I do so with some sadness because I agree with the point made on the H-2B visa by the gentleman from Michigan.

However, within this J-1 bill before us, H.R. 1127, is legislation to extend the Conrad 30 program, which expires on March 6, 2009. Now, that is a program, the basis of which many foreign medical professionals presently serving in many medically underserved areas, including in North Dakota, are here. So if we don't get this done in time—and let's face it. March 6, 2009 is right on our head right now—we raise havoc with the delivery of medical care through many rural underserved areas. We are literally talking about the medical professionals having to pack up and go home. We've worked mighty hard to get them there in the first place. If we lose them, they may never come back.

What's more: What about the patients in these rural clinics this afternoon who are seeing their physicians? What if the physician is gone and care is disrupted?

There are many ways to make a point, but we have got something that could be, for many, a matter of life and death, and that's keeping these medical professionals in the rural area by extending for 6 months this Conrad State 30 Program. It's just too important. We need it too badly.

So I urge the enactment of this legislation, giving us 6 more months on that