

H.R. 1219

Security and Fairness Enhancement for America (SAFE for America) Act of 2005

Introduced by Rep. Goodlatte (R-VA) on March 10, 2005

9 Original Cosponsors

H.R. 1219 eliminates the visa lottery program which provides 50,000 visas per year to nationals of countries that have sent fewer than 50,000 immigrants to the United States in the past five years. Applicants must show only that they are nationals of an eligible country and that they have a high school diploma (or the equivalent) or two years' work experience. Lottery winners are chosen randomly by computer from among the millions of applications submitted each year. The spouses and minor children of winners are admitted to the United States, as well, but without regard to their education or work experience.

The State Department received 6.3 million applications for the FY 2006 visa lottery. Nationals of every country in the world except the following were eligible to apply: Canada, China (Mainland-Born), Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, South Korea, United Kingdom (except Northern Ireland) and its dependent territories, and Vietnam.

The State Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) reviewed the visa lottery program in September, 2003, and concluded that the program "contains significant vulnerabilities to national security as hostile intelligence officers, criminals, and terrorists attempt to use it to enter the United States as permanent residents." Hesham Mohamed Ali Hedayet, the Egyptian national who killed two and wounded three during a shooting spree at Los Angeles International Airport in July of 2002, is an example of such vulnerabilities. Hedayet entered the United States on a tourist visa and then applied for asylum. His asylum application was denied, in part because he was alleged by the Egyptian government to be a member of a terrorist organization. He was able to obtain lawful permanent resident status in 1997 because of his wife's status as a visa lottery winner. At an April, 2004, hearing before the Immigration, Border Security, and Claims Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies testified: "If one were to set out to design a visa that was ideal for terrorists, the visa lottery system would be it."