

Last week, I reintroduced the Reuniting Families Act (RFA), a bill aimed at fixing the problems in our family-based immigration system that separate spouses, children and their parents, who have played by the rules for years. Studies have shown that lengthy waits waste precious government resources and can discourage potential applicants from using legal channels to join their families in the United States. Our family-based immigration system has not been updated in 20 years, leaving nearly 6 million people stuck in perpetual waiting, which is both unproductive and inexcusable. Five-year separations are quite common; so are 20-year estrangements from siblings and elderly parents. Waits are so long that families receiving visas often find that their children have to reapply as adults and go to the back of the line.

The Reuniting Families Act reduces the backlog for families trying to reunite with their loved ones by classifying lawful permanent resident spouses and children as “immediate relatives” and exempting them from numerical caps on family immigration. The bill also recognizes the sacrifices that certain World War II Filipino veterans made for this country by exempting their children from the numerical caps on visas. This legislation will help ensure that visas are allocated efficiently, while alleviating lengthy wait times that keep legal immigrants, and their loved ones overseas, separated for years. RFA also finally eliminates discrimination in immigration law against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans and their foreign-born partners.

The Reuniting Families Act legislation is in line with American family values and with our need to grow our economy and save taxpayer money. American workers with families by their side are happier, healthier and more able to succeed than those distanced from loved ones for years on end. Immigrants who become U.S. citizens consistently pursue higher-paying jobs and higher education, spend more and provide higher tax revenue. The legalization process also brings economic benefits — like the retention of remittances. Workers send substantial portions of their salary to family members abroad, but reform could reunite families separated by our immigration system and keep monies in the U.S. The Reuniting Families Act represents a giant step forward in that commitment and provides a blueprint that respects families, strengthens our economy and fixes a badly broken system. For every day Congress delays, more families face separation.