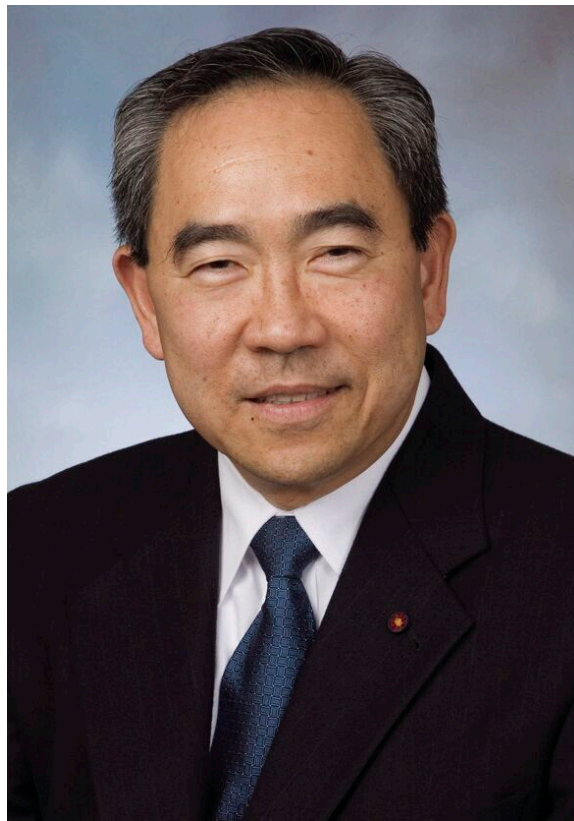


Guest Column: Congress should address the nursing shortage by passing the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act

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In the ever-evolving healthcare landscape, few issues are as alarming and pervasive as the nursing shortage. Throughout medical facilities nationwide, a silent crisis is unfolding — one that threatens the foundation of our healthcare system.

As the demand for quality care surges, our healthcare industry finds itself on the precipice of disaster — at a critical juncture where the supply of skilled nurses cannot keep pace with overwhelming patient needs and demands. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that legislators enact thoughtful policies to support an industry in triage mode.

A proposed bill offers an immediate solution to this potentially fatal issue.

The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act, or HWRA, is a bipartisan effort to rehabilitate the nursing industry by leveraging the vast pool of trained and qualified international healthcare professionals seeking employment in the United States to fill critical gaps in care. In this time of dire need, its swift passage could be a question of life or death.

Since the onset of COVID-19, healthcare professionals have fled the field in droves. Spurred by waning resources, understaffed facilities and widespread burnout, we are losing caretakers at a rapid rate. Healthcare consultant McKinsey & Co. estimates that by 2025, the United States will experience a shortage of up to 450,000 nurses, which is 20 percent of the nursing workforce. Nurses are the first to acknowledge the effect of this shortage on their ability to care for patients adequately. A study by ConnectRN found that 90 percent of nurses think the quality of patient care has suffered due to understaffed facilities.

In the face of this unprecedented crisis — one that has rendered 97.6 million Americans as living in a “health professional shortage area” — the government has failed to institute policies offering our medical facilities immediate reprieve.

Currently, thousands of international healthcare professionals seek employment in the United States. Foreign-educated nurses are highly trained professionals who are qualified to provide care at medical facilities throughout the nation. Their employment offers a reliable, effective means to fill the gaps in care that could soon become chasms. However, they have been blocked from taking up viable employment opportunities for no other reason than unnecessary regulatory red tape.

Last year, the State Department issued a freeze on visa applications to account for the unprecedented demand for U.S.-based employment after COVID-19. As a result, thousands of qualified medical professionals have been forced to wait until at least 2025 to take up positions that the United States is fundamentally in need of now.

If passed, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act immediately removes this pitfall in our immigration process.

The HWRA capitalizes on resources that would otherwise go to waste. The bill would recapture unused immigrant visas from years past and redistribute them to qualified healthcare professionals seeking employment in the United States, currently in an unnecessary backlog of applicants. The bill does not call for the creation of new visas; it simply reallocates a pool of unused employment opportunities previously authorized by Congress.

The demand for healthcare services is increasing. Without sufficient nurses to meet this demand, patient care is at risk. Legislators must pass the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act. By enacting policies that support a sector decimated by the pandemic, we can ensure a strong and sustainable nursing pipeline now and in the future.

It is time to prioritize the wellbeing of our caretakers and put our patients at the center of what we do. We all benefit by giving our medical professionals the necessary resources and personnel. Legislators must pass the

HWRA now.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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