



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 20, 2023

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AAD and CAA Jointly Endorse GRATEFUL Act

*Washington, D.C. – The **American Academy of Diplomacy** and the **Council of American Ambassadors** strongly support and urge rapid passage of S. 1887 - **GRATEFUL Act: Preserving U.S. Government Employee Abroad Immigrant Visa Program.***

Local staff are crucial to the functioning of US diplomatic missions abroad and to achieving our goals, including protecting our citizens, promoting US business and services, fighting crime and stopping drug smuggling. Our locally hired staff support every department and agency of the US government working overseas: Treasury, State, Commerce, Defense, Justice, USAID, and others depend on local employees for effective mission accomplishment. In return for their loyal work, local employees who served the US government faithfully for 20 years (minimum of 15 years in exceptional circumstances) have long been entitled to immigrate to America at the end of their service. Owing to a bureaucratic quirk, our loyal employees all over the world are now finding no visa numbers are left to issue them the visas to which they are legally entitled.

The *GRATEFUL Act* sponsored by Senators Chris Van Hollen and Thom Tillis would remedy this situation by reallocating to local staff abroad visa numbers allocated to countries that will not otherwise utilize them. This will not increase the total numbers of legally approved immigrants. The Academy and the Council strongly support this bill and urge its bipartisan passage.

Ambassador Ronald Neumann, President of the Academy, noted that “Our local employees abroad are a vital part of the staff of our missions. Refusing to grant the retirement in America that they have counted on through years of service is fundamentally unfair. The GRATEFUL Act would permit America to honor its commitment to those who have stood by the United States and served it loyally.”

Ambassador Timothy Chorba, President of the Council of American Ambassadors, added “It is wrong to let an administrative anomaly rob decades-long US government employees of their opportunity to retire in America when that can so simply and easily be corrected.”

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