



Senate Approves Legislation to Ease Visa Restrictions for Minor League Athletes

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Washington, DC – The U.S. Senate has unanimously approved legislation to ease visa restrictions on athletes from other countries participating in minor league sports leagues, competitions, or performances, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today announced.

“This legislation would level the playing field for minor league athletes,” Senator Feinstein said. **“These athletes are on the path to playing at the major league level, but simply because their teams have decided to start them at the minor league level, they face tougher visa restrictions and may be prevented from playing here at all. That’s not fair, and this legislation would change that.”**

Minor league athletes from other countries currently face much stricter visa restrictions than their major league counterparts. Major league athletes are eligible for “P” visas, but minor league athletes currently must enter the country as part of the H-2B seasonal worker visa program.

This has been a problem in recent years because the H-2B cap of 66,000 visas has been met in the first few months of the fiscal year, leaving foreign minor league athletes with little or no opportunity to enter the United States. As a result, minor league baseball, basketball, hockey, and ice skating programs in the United States have been prevented from recruiting hundreds of foreign athletes each year.

The COMPETE Act would reclassify minor league athletes so that they are eligible to enter the country under the “P” visa category. The legislation would prohibit the issuing of a visa to anyone from a country that is a “state sponsor of international terrorism” unless the Secretary of State determines that person is not a threat.

Sports organizations benefiting from the COMPETE Act include:

- **Major League Baseball**, which was unable to bring 350 baseball players to the United States in the 2004 and 2005 seasons when the H-2B visa caps were filled before they were able to provide visas for minor league players they wanted to recruit.

- **The National Basketball Association**, which has been unable to sign a significant number of qualified international players to its Development League during each of the past two seasons because of the cap on H-2B visas.
- **Disney on Ice**, which is often short on ice skaters for their productions because the H-2B visa cap has been reached before the commencement of their training period in August, and subsequent touring season beginning in September.

“Minor league sports teams and ice skating organizations deserve to recruit the most talented athletes available from around the world for their programs,” Senator Feinstein said.

The legislation was sponsored by Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine), Feinstein, and John Cornyn (R-Texas). Companion legislation is sponsored in the House by Representative Tom Feeney (R-Fla.).

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