Compete America
The Alliance for a Competitive Workforce

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Compete America Urges DHS to Withdraw Misguided OPT Payment Proposal

Payments Lack Congressional Authorization and Would Disrupt U.S. Employers' Ability to Recruit and Retain Highly Skilled International Talent

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 10, 2026) – Compete America yesterday submitted comments urging the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to withdraw its proposed rule imposing new payments on the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program. Compete America argues that the payments — which would be levied on educational institutions — are an unlawful tax, rest on incomplete and inconsistent economic analysis, and would make it harder for U.S. employers to recruit and retain U.S.-educated highly skilled international talent who make great contributions to U.S. innovation, manufacturing, and job creation.

The impact of the proposed payments would be greatest in technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and research, sectors critical to American leadership in AI and advanced manufacturing. Increasing the cost of retaining U.S.-educated STEM graduates risks driving both highly skilled workers and future investment to competitors abroad.

In its comments, Compete America states:

> *"Compete America … has a strong interest in ensuring that the U.S. immigration system, with appropriate integrity and security safeguards, enables U.S. employers to attract and retain the highly skilled professionals needed to innovate, grow, and create jobs in the United States. …*
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> *"Compete America supports targeted enforcement against actual instances of fraud, meaningful program oversight, and protection of U.S. workers. But the proposed payments are neither authorized by law nor reasonably designed to advance the stated objectives. They are unrelated to the fees Congress authorized for SEVP [Student and Exchange Visitor Program], and the money would go to the general Treasury rather than fund the investigations, site visits, system improvements, or adjudications DHS cites as justification for the payments.*
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> *"The proposal would also undermine the administration's stated goals of winning the global AI race and leading in cutting-edge science and technology."*

Underscoring the importance of OPT to U.S. employers and the American economy, Scott Corley, Executive Director of Compete America, said:

> *"OPT is an important part of an all-of-the-above talent strategy that allows U.S. employers to invest in American workers while drawing on highly skilled international talent as a complementary source of skills and expertise. Retaining highly skilled graduates of U.S. colleges and universities supports innovation, economic growth, and America's ability to compete globally in sectors critical to U.S. leadership in AI and advanced manufacturing.*
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> *"Imposing prohibitive costs for high-skilled graduates to work in the United States would send these talented people elsewhere, undermining U.S. economic competitiveness and national security. We urge DHS to withdraw this proposal and pursue targeted safeguards that protect program integrity without creating unnecessary barriers for U.S. employers."*

To read the full comment, click here.

About Compete America

Compete America: The Alliance for a Competitive Workforce ("Compete America") advocates for ensuring that the United States has the capacity to educate domestic sources of professional talent and to attract and retain the international talent necessary for U.S. employers to continue innovating and creating jobs in America. Our coalition members include higher education associations, industry associations, the nation's largest business and trade associations, and individual employers — all working together to advance access to high-skilled talent, including those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics ("STEM") fields, by growing critical workforce development opportunities for U.S. workers stateside and improving the U.S. high-skilled immigration system. For more than 20 years, Compete America has worked with successive administrations and Congress on issues critical to the professional global mobility of talent, as well as the functionality and integrity of the U.S. employment-based immigration system.

Members of our coalition are among the nation's foremost creators of jobs for U.S. workers. Our members contribute to the nation's economic strength and global competitiveness. In addition to the U.S. workers who comprise the vast majority of their workforces, our members also leverage the talents of well-educated and highly skilled professionals from abroad, including professionals working in STEM fields. Many of these highly sought-after professionals have been drawn to this country not only by the vast opportunities for innovation and growth offered by U.S. employers, but also by America's unmatched higher education system and world-class research and development enterprise. competeamerica.org