

Immigration failings still need fixing

OUR OPINION: GIVE APPLICANTS FOR U.S. RESIDENCY WHAT WAS PROMISED

Opinión
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America's love-hate relationship with immigrants played out in a troubling way last week. That's when the government slammed the door on thousands of legal immigrants it had encouraged to apply for permanent residency only the month before.

The abrupt turnabout hurt immigrants who played by the rules. At least one person has filed a lawsuit against the government. Others will follow, including a class-action suit by the American Immigration Lawyers Association. They have good reason. The federal government should deliver what it promised to those who applied for residency in good faith.

Bureaucratic infighting

Blame the legal mess on bureaucratic infighting between the two federal agencies involved: the State Department and Citizenship and Immigration Services. More broadly, the incident reflects the government's inability to manage immigration levels or services.

The State Department set off a rush for green cards on June 12 when it announced that employer-sponsored green cards would be available on July 2 for highly skilled foreign workers previously found eligible. These folks had federal certification that they would not be taking the job of any U.S. resident.

Thousands of doctors, researchers, technicians and other professionals with temporary visas jumped at the opportunity to gain permanent status for themselves and their family. They deposited hefty legal fees, had medical exams and completed employer-sponsorship forms. Some canceled vacation plans and brought dependents from overseas to be here on the filing date, as the law requires.

But when July 2 arrived, the State Department backpedaled. Citizenship and Immigration Services had worked overtime processing 60,000 backlogged applications. No more visas were left. The door shut for thousands who waited years for their turn. Now Congress is questioning whether CIS took short cuts.

Yet the annual quota of 140,000 visas was filled for the first time this decade. Indeed, about 183,000 employment-based visas have expired since 2000 because CIS couldn't process them in time. That's disgraceful.

Chronic backlogs

These chronic backlogs demonstrate two shortcomings. First, the current levels of labor visas fall woefully short of demand. Second, CIS is unable to keep up with its workload.

These are only two pieces of the system that beg for improvement now that broad immigration reform is off the table. Congress should increase U.S. immigration quotas, which have not changed for years despite economic growth and labor shortages. Congress also should make sure CIS can handle current work loads and any future reforms.