

U.S. to Reverse Some Denials Of Work Visas

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Looking to resolve a messy immigration tangle, the U.S. government is close to announcing that it will accept at least some applications for work-based green cards that were filed by thousands of skilled workers in early July at the government's invitation and then abruptly rejected.

Tens of thousands of skilled workers, many of them in the U.S. on temporary H1B visas, responded to an official invitation, in a June 12 "visa bulletin" issued by the State Department, to take the final step in July toward attaining U.S. permanent residency. That sent workers, their families and their employers scrambling to compile paperwork and meet other requirements such as medical exams. Normally, eligible employment-sponsored workers wait years for their numbers to be called.

Then, July 2, as applications poured into processing centers, the State Department announced in a bulletin "update" that no employment-based immigrant visas were left for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30 because of "sudden backlog reduction" by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. USCIS announced it would reject applications that it received.

People familiar with the situation say that officials are working out the final details of a plan that would at least partially rectify the problem.

It isn't clear, however, whether the immigration agency will now accept all applications and process them later, accept only those that have arrived, or come up with some other approach.

The July 2 decision provoked outrage among immigration lawyers, foreign workers and their employers. July 5, Microsoft Corp. announced that it plans soon to open a software-development center in Vancouver, Canada, with a view to "recruit and retain highly skilled people affected by immigration issues in the U.S." The announcement sent a clear signal to the government of the high-tech industry's dissatisfaction with the visa situation.

July 6, a large Chicago immigration law firm filed a lawsuit seeking class-action status against the government. Separately, the American Immigration Law Foundation, a nonprofit group, said it will file this week its own suit seeking class-action status.

Meanwhile, disgruntled green-card applicants cried foul, saying they had been unfairly treated by the government despite playing by the rules.