

Immigrants Pack Agency, Trying to Beat A Deadline

The New York Times

January 15, 1998, Thursday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 1998 The New York Times Company

Distribution: Metropolitan Desk

Section: Section B; ; Section B; Page 6; Column 1; Metropolitan Desk ; Column 1;

Length: 693 words

Byline: By RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD

By RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD

Body

Scores of illegal **immigrants** around the metropolitan region crowded offices of the Immigration and Naturalization Service yesterday as a midnight expiration loomed on a Federal law that allowed them to stay in the country while applying for residency.

For three years under the law, many illegal **immigrants** were allowed to remain in the United States while their applications were being processed, as long as they paid a \$1,000 fine -- an option many used to keep families intact and jobs secure.

But Congress, in a crackdown on illegal immigration, set a **deadline** of midnight last night for the expiration of the law, known as Section 245(i), meaning illegal residents who did not file in time must return to their homelands and wait for their green cards there. What is more, some could be barred from re-entering the country for 3 to 10 years.

So hours before the **deadline**, scores of **immigrants** crowded the Federal offices in an attempt to **beat** the clock and avoid deportation.

Among them were Juan Vasquez, a 22-year-old machine operator from Mexico, and his 17-year-old wife of two years, Ana, also of Mexico. The couple, bundled up against the evening chill outside the Federal building in Manhattan, beamed with relief at a receipt from the immigration service acknowledging that the wife's petition was filed on time.

"We heard this week on the radio that we had to file by today," said Mr. Vasquez, of Milltown, N.Y., a legal resident who has been in the United States for four years and is sponsoring his wife's application. "I'm glad we got it in on time so my wife can stay and go to work."

The story was much the same at I.N.S. offices across the region, where yet another change in immigration law brought the usual confusion accompanying any change in the rules.

At the immigration office in Newark, for instance, a 50-year-old cashier from the Philippines who works in an East Brunswick, N.J., bakery and was already approved for a green card mistakenly took a place in line anyway because "my brothers in California kept calling and calling and said I had to go get my green card because the **deadline** was today."

Immigrants Pack Agency, Trying to Beat A Deadline

Immigration lawyers said they fielded numerous calls from people who misunderstood the complicated law, enacted three years ago but swept away under provisions of the Illegal Immigration Reform and **Immigrant** Responsibility Act of 1996.

"People are going to panic," said Shyconia A. Burden, a spokeswoman for the immigration service's New York office, which had about 20 of its 45 officers work until midnight accepting the applications.

She did not have an estimate of how many people were expected to show up in New York, but by yesterday evening more than 300 had lined up under a large white tent set up outside the Federal building.

By early evening, the Newark office had received about 300 applications in a steady stream. The Hartford office also reported a busy day, but no figures were immediately available.

Advocates for **immigrants** estimate that at least a quarter of a million people in the United States will be affected by the change in the law. The provision was adopted in part to diminish the work load at American consulates worldwide. Before 245(i), green card applicants were required to go back to their countries to process their paperwork. But the law also provides the **agency** revenue: with each applicant paying \$1,000, the immigration service received \$147.5 million in 1996 and expected to receive \$214.5 million in 1997.

Lawmakers who backed the changes have said the old rules rewarded people who broke the law, allowing them to stay illegally for years while they waited to be approved for green cards. But opponents of the change said it left **immigrants** in a quandary: they could stay illegally in the United States and hope they were not caught and deported, or they could return to their homeland, apply for legal residency and then perhaps wait the 3 to 10 years before they would be allowed to return to the United States.

Immigration lawyers predicted that most illegal **immigrants** who would have been eligible for residency under 245(i) would go "underground."

Graphic

Photo: **Immigrants** waited in long lines yesterday at the immigration service offices in Newark to have their stay extended while seeking residency. A Federal law allowing them to remain was to expire at midnight yesterday. (Frank C. Dougherty for The New York Times)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (94%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); DEPORTATION (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); APPROVALS (72%); FINES & PENALTIES (71%); PETITIONS (69%)

Company: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

Immigrants Pack Agency, Trying to Beat A Deadline

Geographic: NEWARK, NJ, USA (78%); NEW YORK, NY, USA (78%); NEW YORK, USA (92%); NEW JERSEY, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (92%); PHILIPPINES (79%)

Load-Date: January 15, 1998

End of Document