

## **Post Office Flooded With Immigrant Applications**

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**Byline:** By LEROY TILLMAN, Associated Press Writer

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### **Body**

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In a scene reminiscent of last-minute rushes on Christmas Eve and the April tax filing deadline, thousands of immigrants descended on a suburban Washington, D.C., **post office** for a chance at receiving coveted **green cards**.

Over the weekend, immigrants hand-delivered **applications**, some 1,000 at a time, hoping to be one of the lucky 40,000 people who would be granted permanent residence status and work permits through a special giveaway.

"The State Department originally estimated there would be 5 **million** applicants nationwide for the available slots," said Postal Service spokesman Henry Cleffi. "However, that estimate was a little low, as we're now expecting 15 **million applications** for the 40,000 slots."

To be eligible for the giveaway, valid **applications** could not be processed until 12:01 a.m. EDT today. **Millions** that were **posted** too early were invalidated.

Extra postal workers were brought in at a regional mail-sorting facility here to sort, process and bundle the **applications** that began pouring in Friday night.

The State Department tried to discourage immigrants from bringing the **applications** in person, saying that would confer no advantage.

Nevertheless, Fairfax County police estimated that 30,000 immigrants visited the **post office** on Saturday, and projected a similar crowd on Sunday.

"We never thought this would attract such a large crowd. We also never thought that the crowd would stay as long as they have," Cleffi said.

Many of the immigrants expressed hope their vigilance would not go unrewarded.

"It would mean everything to me to be an American citizen," said a man who identified himself only as a Russian national. "This is the greatest country in the world and I want to be a part of it. I would do anything to become an American citizen."

That sentiment was the prevailing mood among the several thousand people who continued to mill about the postal facility.

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"For some of these people here this is the dream of a lifetime. Their aspirations are so strong, their dedication so fervent, that they realize that there is a possibility that many of them will not become citizens." said one woman who asked to remain anonymous.

"But it just makes you feel so good that so many people, some of whom have been living in this country, in some cases for years without their proper papers, would take a risk to come out on a night like tonight in order to be welcomed into the greatest nation in the world."

The giveaway was open mainly to citizens of European countries and Japan, which have had relatively little immigration in recent years. A 1990 law requires that 40 percent of the **green cards** go to Irish immigrants.

Officials said they lost control of the crowd for a few minutes Saturday evening, when hundreds of immigrants began pushing and shoving and throwing their **applications** at bins lined up outside the **office**.

"For about four of five minutes, it was crazy, it was absolute chaos," Postal Service spokesman Robert Faruq Sr. said Sunday.

There were no arrests or injuries reported. Afterward, postal workers set up more bins and spread them around the property to disperse the crowd.

The trickle of immigrants that began showing up early last week grew into a fair-like event, complete with food vendors, portable toilets and hundreds of yards of yellow ribbon barriers that police set up to direct people and cars.

Many immigrants took breaks from licking stamps to take pictures with video and still cameras, and a few said they wanted to sightsee in Washington before returning home.

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