

## **Chung: Green-card turnaround restores faith**

San Jose Mercury News (California)

July 21, 2007 Saturday

Copyright 2007 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

**Section:** NEWS; Local; Columnists

**Length:** 600 words

**Byline:** By L.A. **Chung** Mercury News Columnist

### **Body**

---

Tamsen Mitchell never envisioned herself as the type to march in a protest rally. The 33-year-old is a game company project manager, here on an employment-based visa, stuck in what seems like the never-ending line for a **green card**.

A week later, the British woman was marveling at two things: The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services reversed itself on a controversial move it made July 2 - and that she had found herself marching in San Jose in hopes of bringing about that reversal.

"People like me don't normally protest," she said. "We're . . . the doctors and programmers and research scientist people."

On Tuesday, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff announced that the USCIS would accept the applications it rejected July 2, after all. The agency extended the deadline to Aug. 17. It also allowed the old application fees, which had been set to more than double from \$393 to \$1,010 on July 30, to stand.

The move **restores** credibility in the fairness of a process that had set off a mad scramble among individuals who had waited for their eligibility to apply for a permanent residency visa, only to be shut out at the last minute.

The one certain thing

"It is a very bad time to be taking aim at those immigrants who were trying to follow the law," said Benjamin Johnson, executive director of the American Immigration Law Foundation. "It raises the question, 'You don't like the illegal ones, and now you don't want the legal ones to apply?'"

Mitchell had submitted her application in late June, but she knew of hundreds who had to drop everything in an effort that involved family members, companies and thousands of dollars to meet the July 2 deadline.

When the State Department, through its visa bulletins, signals that it is time to apply for a **green card**, it is a singular, special moment, Johnson said.

"It is the light at the end of the tunnel," Johnson said. "It is huge." That is why the sudden rejection had reverberated from Washington to Silicon Valley. Frustration caused Mitchell, a member of Immigration Voice, to reach out to colleagues at Cisco, Sun and Google to join last week's march. In D.C., Immigration Voice members organized a novel protest: Thousands of floral bouquets were sent to USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez.

Many factors

"I heard people talking about it," Johnson said. "That means something in Washington."

## Chung: Green-card turnaround restores faith

So did the legal foundation's preparation of a class-action lawsuit. So did U.S. Rep Zoe Lofgren's letter asking Chertoff to provide detailed documentation of what led to the sudden cutoff.

Both actions meant the USCIS would have to reveal the internal process by which they receive and count visas and make decisions, Johnson said. Correcting the error was a better option.

"To be fair, there were plenty of people in the administration who understood that the immigrants who are trying to follow the law shouldn't bear the burden of their mistake - people who recognized this just wasn't fair," he said.

It's hard to appreciate this from the outside. Mitchell's American boyfriend, after listening to her problems, had a Californian's analogy for her: "It sounds like going to the DMV, but 10 times worse." Perhaps a hundredfold. "Many of us have been stuck in this process for 10 years," Mitchell said.

They had high spirits on the march, but Mitchell calls the reversal just a "baby step" compared to the immigration reform.

"We were very shocked something good came of it," she said. "As a group, we're under no illusion it was just us who did that; we're just part of the bigger puzzle."

Contact L.A. **Chung** at [ichung@mercurynews.com](mailto:ichung@mercurynews.com) or (408) 920-5280.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (91%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (90%); PROTESTS & DEMONSTRATIONS (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (77%); EXECUTIVES (73%); MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS (73%); SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (71%); SUITS & CLAIMS (70%); LITIGATION (69%); NATIONAL SECURITY (54%)

**Company:** GOOGLE INC (51%)

**Organization:** US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (56%)

**Ticker:** GOOG (NASDAQ) (51%)

**Person:** MICHAEL CHERTOFF (56%); ZOE LOFGREN (56%)

**Geographic:** SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CA, USA (77%); SAN JOSE, CA, USA (73%); SILICON VALLEY, CA, USA (57%); DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

**Load-Date:** July 21, 2007