

## The battle for a Green Card intensifies in the US

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They are doctors, engineers and other professionals who came to the United States (US) from India. Some came to study with plans of staying on if things worked out, and others arrived on work contracts with dotted lines to permanent residency, also called Green Cards, and citizenship eventually.

While waiting for their Green Cards, some of them have grown older, insecure, frustrated and, now, more frightened than they have ever been. If laid-off because of the economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, as some have been, they will lose their spot in the Green Card queue and face deportation. As will families of those who were killed by the virus.

They are desperate. And so desperate that, to their own amazement, they are taking on a powerful US senator who, they are convinced, is the only man standing between them and their Green Cards: Richard Durbin, the senior Democratic senator from Illinois.

Indian Green Card hopefuls believe Durbin is determined to see them deported, with their children who have not known any other country other than the US. Starting next week, these Green Card hopefuls plan to run running TV spots and full-page advertisements to highlight what they argue is plain bias. Immigration Voice, an activist group that has represented them and campaigned for changing laws to cut the Green Card waiting period, has accused the senator of being a “racist”.

The US grants around one million employment-based and family-based Green Cards every year. There is a cap of 7% for applicants from any one country in the work-based category. Indians in the queue outnumber nationals from other countries by a sizable number. Those left over from the annual quota, mostly Indians, are added to the backlog, which has grown so large that Cato Institute, a conservative think-tank, estimates that someone who applies now may have to wait for nearly 150 years — an impossible prospect.

Efforts have been underway for years to fix the problem. One solution, which has emerged as the most acceptable to both Democrats and Republicans, is to remove the country limit. The reform was passed in the House of Representative last August, but its passage in the Senate has been blocked by just one senator, Durbin. He has moved a rival legislation that seeks to address the backlog created due to the expansion of the number of Green Cards.

The Indian government is aware of their plight — 306,000, according to the US Citizenship and Immigration Service, and 1.5 million, according to Immigration Voice — and has quietly

canvassed their case with US stakeholders. But it is unable to do more, constrained by the oddity of the situation — lobbying the US to accept more immigrants from India. It has still tried, to its credit.

There is a larger message here for Indians planning to study or work in the US with hopes of staying on. Life in the Green Card queue is probably not worth it with something like Durbin (not someone, which is a self-limiting definition of an attitude, mindset), waiting at the other end.