



Little-noticed spending bill provision could fix green card backlog

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Re-created from [CATO Institute](#); Chart: Axios Visuals

Immigrants caught in backlogs to receive green cards could become U.S. permanent residents years — even decades — faster if a little-noticed provision in President Biden's \$1.75 trillion "human" infrastructure bill becomes law.

Driving the news: The provision would recover more than 400,000 family and employment-based green cards previously authorized by Congress but unused since 1992, according to data confirmed by a Senate aide.

- The cards allow permanent residency, though not citizenship right away.
- “It is disappointing that the United States is unable to adequately process green card visas in a timely fashion,” Google spokesperson José Castañeda told Axios.
- “We support the House provision to recapture green card visas and encourage the administration to process green card visas quicker.”

By the numbers: Nearly 224,000 green cards allocated by Congress from 1992 to 2019 were never used, according to data from [the CATO Institute](#), presented above.

- An additional 200,000 went unused in 2020, largely due to coronavirus-related processing delays, according to data from the American Immigration Council.
- Roughly 140,000 family-based and 62,000 employment-based visas expired Oct. 1.

Between the lines: Backlogs and caps on the number of green cards handed out to individual countries mean applicants often wait years in backlogs before receiving immigrant visas or green cards.

- In 2005, Congress recaptured 50,000 green cards that went unused from 2001 to 2004.
- The idea of additional green card recapture has gained some bipartisan consensus, amid a sea of disagreement on immigration reform, although it's also faced backlash from some Republican members.

Details: Under the current bill, some employment-based green card applicants would be able to pay a \$5,000 fee to waive the annual and per-country limitations and become permanent residents.

- So far, there have been no dissenting voices among Senate Democrats, but the measure in the current bill would still have to survive a "Byrd bath" — a formal test of the provisions' budgetary effects — in the coming weeks.
- The Senate parliamentarian has already rejected other measures that would have included alternate citizenship pathways for undocumented immigrants.