

Harvard scholars: Travel ban deprives US of best, brightest

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Harvard medical researcher Soumya Raychaudhuri, of Brookline, Mass., pauses during an interview at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. Raychaudhuri awaits the fate of a new hire, Samira Asgari, an Iranian national who was not allowed to board a flight in Switzerland to Boston due to the travel ban issued by President Donald Trump. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Harvard Medical School professor Thomas Michel was so excited about recruiting Iranian researcher Soheil Saravi, he put Saravi's name on the door of his Boston lab when his new hire got his visa.

Then President Donald Trump's travel ban took effect, blocking Saravi from entering the U.S.

"It's interesting. This is a door. It's open," Michel said Tuesday. But he added this lament: "He can't walk through the door into this country to walk into this laboratory."

Trump's ban on people from Iran and six other predominantly Muslim countries has frustrated academics like Michel, who feel like they've been robbed of a brain trust.

Boston and other U.S. cities have long prided themselves on attracting the world's best and brightest. Many have been immigrants, and over the past half-century, their work has contributed to numerous Nobel Prizes.

But the ban and the legal tussles it has touched off have cloaked all that in uncertainty.

Another Harvard researcher, Soumya Raychaudhuri, is impatiently awaiting the fate of a new hire, Samira Asgari.

Asgari, also Iranian, said last weekend that she was not allowed to board a flight in Switzerland bound for her new job in Boston because of the ban—even though she already had been issued a J-1 visa allowing her to work in the U.S.



In this Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017, photo, Harvard Medical School professor Thomas Michel, of Lincoln, Mass., poses for a photo in his office at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Michel said he was excited about hiring Iranian national Soheil Saravi, but Saravi hasn't been allowed to enter the U.S., due to the travel ban issued by President Donald Trump, even though he has a visa allowing him to work in the country. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

"Feeling safer?" she tweeted.

"It's a major setback," Raychaudhuri said. "She has expertise in infectious disease, as well as expertise in computational approaches. That combination is very rare. To find someone with that skill set is really a challenge."

Saravi was to have worked on a research project examining the contractions of [heart muscle cells](#) and blood vessels.

His chances and Asgari's prospects of being allowed to enter the U.S. remained unclear. The Trump administration insists the order is necessary to keep potential terrorists out of the country until security procedures are improved.

"This is turning away the best and the brightest who want to come here, who see this as the land of opportunity," Michel said. "America will become less great as a consequence of these policies. I'm not a politician, I'm a scientist."

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