



EDUCATION

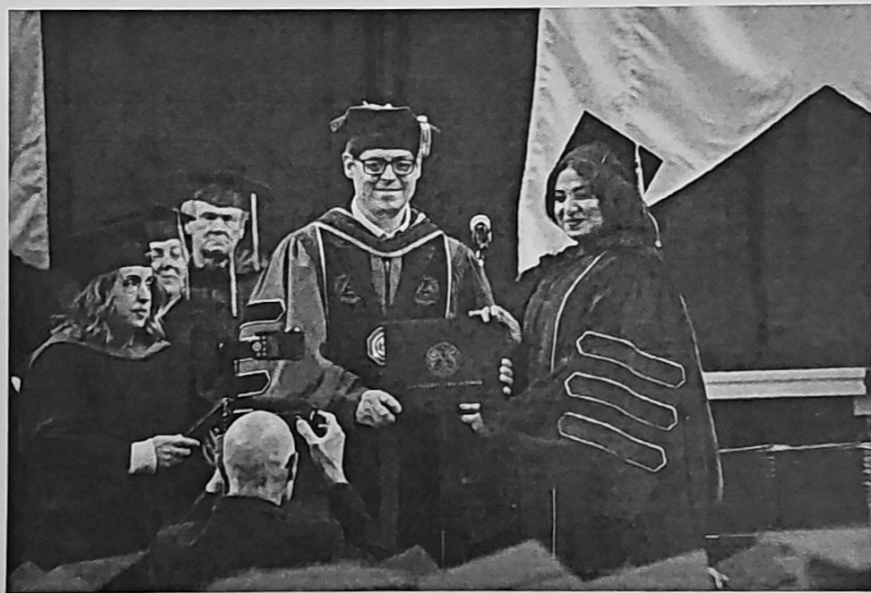
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Judge shields Rapid City international student from removal while lawsuit proceeds

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 15, 2025 2:54 PM



📷 Priya Saxena, right, poses for a photo with South Dakota Mines President Brian Tande after receiving her doctoral and master's degrees May 10, 2025, during a commencement ceremony in Summit Arena at Rapid City. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

A woman from India who recently earned master's and doctoral degrees from South Dakota Mines in Rapid City can't be removed from the U.S. as her lawsuit against the federal government proceeds, a judge has ruled.

Priya Saxena sued U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem last month after Saxena learned that her

visa had been revoked, and that Homeland Security had, in turn, terminated her record in the federal database that clears international students to study in the country.

U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier ruled on Thursday that the terms of a temporary restraining order against Homeland Security that she'd applied in the case last month should extend out for the duration of the lawsuit's proceedings.

International student recounts 'numb' feeling after receiving email about her potential deportation



RAPID CITY — Priya Saxena was staying up late to read comments about her doctoral dissertation around 1 a.m. on April 7 when she saw the message in her email. "I was numb at the time," she testified

through tears Tuesday in a Rapid City courtroom, where she continued her fight to remain in the ... Continue reading



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Saxena was among more than 1,000 students who'd had their student records scrubbed by Homeland Security in recent months. She's also one of many who'd earned court orders to reverse the record removal. Homeland Security opted to reinstate the student records last month, and had argued in South Dakota court documents that doing so made Saxena's lawsuit moot.

Through her lawyer, Jim Leach of Rapid City, Saxena argued that it wasn't moot, as without court intervention the government could resume its attempts to deport her at any point.

Saxena collected her degrees from Mines on Saturday.

Days later in court, Saxena told Schreier that she'd hoped to stay in the U.S. and apply to work under the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service's Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which allows international students to stay in the U.S. and work in their field following graduation.

In Thursday's ruling, Judge Schreier wrote that the cloud of potential deportation proceedings should not hang over Saxena as she moves to participate in the post-degree work program.

"Saxena's uncertain legal status as it relates to her ability to apply for OPT programs and the more-than speculative risk that she may be arrested and deported," Schreier wrote, justifies an injunction to stop the federal government from interfering with Saxena's plans.



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John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.