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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **INS Plans Management Changes and Resource Boost To Improve Citizenship System**

WASHINGTON – The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) today unveiled a package of management reforms and new resources designed to provide greater momentum to the agency's efforts to revitalize the nation's citizenship system and reduce the backlog of pending cases.

INS is implementing major new initiatives designed to improve customer service by making the process more timely and efficient. Key elements include:

- Creating backlog reduction teams to work in the five offices responsible for 65 percent of the caseload. This includes hiring 200 additional adjudicators, expanding support staff, and increasing overtime;
- Building a new Immigration Services Division to focus special attention on providing better services in field offices;
- Naming a "Customer Service Advocate" within this new division to oversee the agency's efforts in improving service delivery and timeliness;
- Developing a nationwide telephone customer service center to answer questions about eligibility for citizenship and other benefits, application procedures, and individual case status; and
- Continuing efforts underway to reduce the backlog and reengineer the naturalization system.

The Clinton Administration has identified \$171 million in additional funding to bolster efforts underway to improve the naturalization process and will seek congressional approval of the request. This request includes \$88 million in resources necessary to maintain services at their current levels—due to a shortfall caused by fewer applications—and \$83 million needed to make further inroads. These new resources will be key in helping the agency complete a total of 1.5 million naturalization applications beginning next year. This level of productivity, when combined with the significant decrease in the number of incoming applications, will substantially reduce the backlog of pending cases.

## **INS Plans Major Resource Boost and Management Changes**

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"These new resources, together with management changes we are putting into place, will give us the momentum we need to attack the backlog and help rebuild the naturalization system," Meissner said. "We have made significant strides in restoring the system's integrity and modernizing it, and we are now redoubling our efforts to deliver timely service to people who have been waiting far too long."

Meissner also announced she is creating an Immigration Services Division within the Office of Field Operations to provide better and more timely service in field offices across the country. Within this new division, INS will name officials to focus on backlog reduction, customer service, reengineering and other daily adjudications operations.

The new division will be overseen on an interim basis by William R. Yates, the agency's Eastern Region Director and one of its highest-ranking officials with an INS service background. Yates will serve in this new role of Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner while INS recruits a permanent official for this new position. This new structure will build on the ground work laid by the Office of Naturalizations (ONO) over the past year in creating a specialized focus on naturalization and integrity. This step will expand that focus to all services within INS and strengthen the coordination necessary between headquarters and the field to improve timeliness and customer service.

"The Administration is committed to rebuilding the nation's naturalization system and INS has laid a strong foundation for it," Meissner said. "With this infusion, we will be well on the road to meeting the needs of those frustrated customers whose cases have not been decided. This is also good news for those considering applying for citizenship in the future because they, too, stand to benefit from these enhancements."

Meissner also announced she is delaying the implementation of a naturalization fee increase until January 15, 1999. This fulfills a commitment she made earlier this year to make greater progress on service improvements before raising citizenship fees. She said, however, that INS must increase fees for all other immigration benefits as of October 12, 1998 in order to comply with federal guidelines mandating that federal agencies charge the full cost of fee-for-service programs.

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## FY 1999 Budget Proposal *Additional Funds for Citizenship*

### Background

Fixing the naturalization system is the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) top priority. The agency's focus has been, and will continue to be, improving customer service while ensuring integrity in the process.

While this aggressive approach is making the naturalization process more efficient, more secure, and more convenient for customers, the increased costs for making these changes far exceed the receipts in the agency's Examination Fee Account, the sole source of funding for these services. To cover this revenue shortfall and to accelerate our improvement efforts in FY 1999, the Administration has proposed an additional \$171-million to support naturalization activities. This request includes \$88 million in resources that are necessary to maintain services at their current levels and \$83 million needed to make further inroads.

This year's budget shortfall will be covered by cost-cutting measures at headquarters that will not affect naturalization or enforcement efforts and will have little impact on field operations. Economy measures will continue to be implemented in FY 1999, but additional funding for the Examination Fees Account will still be required for INS to more aggressively attack the backlog and continue its modernization of the naturalization process.

### More Funding, More Improvements

The \$171 million in additional resources will allow INS to:

- Continue efforts underway to reduce backlog and re-engineer the naturalization system. (\$88 million)
- Hire 200 more adjudication officers and expand support staff to serve as dedicated backlog reduction teams. (\$27.4 million)
- Create a nationwide customer service center with telephone service to answer questions about eligibility for benefits, application procedures, and individual case status. This initiative includes almost 500 INS and contract positions. (\$25.2 million)
- Complete test of Service Center file review system aimed at ensuring all applications are complete at time of adjudication. This will reduce the number of cases continued because of missing documents. (\$5.6 million)
- Revitalize and modernize record keeping through greater automation and centralization, targeting overdue file requests, lost files, and other problems in field offices that contribute to the naturalization backlog. (\$6.5 million)

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- Provide on-site computer support and training to help field offices take full advantage of newly automated application processes. (\$6 million)
- Further develop re-engineering plan and implement key recommendations with assistance from outside consultants. (\$3 million)
- Pilot identification system that uses fingerprints to verify identity of the applicants throughout the process, from initial application to swearing-in ceremony. (\$1 million)
- Improve customer service by publishing "A Guide to Naturalization" that contains comprehensive information on the naturalization process and eligibility requirements. (\$2.7 million)
- Consolidate review of medical waiver requests, currently done on a decentralized basis at district offices, at the four Service Centers. (\$1.3 million)
- Pay Service Center employees the overtime necessary to reduce the backlogs in certain non-naturalization applications that take precedence over naturalization cases because they have statutory deadlines for adjudication. (\$4.4 million)

These funds will be reprogrammed from existing source, including a \$25-million carryover from the Examination Fee Account, \$25 million from Breached Bond/Detention Account, and \$121 million from unobligated balances from Department of Justice and INS prior years.

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# BACKGROUNDER

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## Naturalization: Why Is It Taking So Long?

Naturalization applicants are rightfully frustrated by long delays—in some locations as long as two years—to complete the naturalization process. These delays, which also are of utmost concern to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), are the result of an unprecedented surge in citizenship applications coupled with the agency's need to rebuild the entire naturalization system. Building the most secure and timely naturalization system is INS' highest priority.

### Background—The Steps Involved in Naturalization Processing

Completing the processing of a naturalization application—from receipt to oath ceremony—is, in itself, a time-consuming, labor-intensive process that requires a significant amount of time and a host of people within the agency. To ensure integrity, quality assurance checks are made throughout the entire system, which involves five basic processing stages:

**Initial Processing.** An INS Service Center receives the application and follows through on a number of major steps related to:

- Data entry of application information;
- Requesting the applicant's permanent file from all 80 INS locations (if the applicant's file is not found after a diligent 90-day minimum search, a temporary file is created); and
- Scheduling the applicant for fingerprinting at specific INS facility.

**Fingerprinting.** Involves three different entities:

- **INS Application Support Center (ASC)** takes fingerprints on card and sends the card back to the Service Center;
- **INS Service Center** transfers the fingerprint card information onto a "Machine Readable Data" (MRD) tape and sends both tape and fingerprint cards to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI);
- **The FBI** checks fingerprints against criminal databases and sends response back to the Service Center. The average wait time for a response from the FBI is 30 - 45 days; and
- **After FBI background check** is received, INS Service Center forwards the applicant's file to local INS office for interview.

**Interviewing.** The application is reviewed and decided at the INS District Office. The following steps are involved:

- Local office receives the case and assigns it to an adjudicator;

- Adjudicator interviews applicant to ensure he/she meets all eligibility requirements (is 18 years of age, has knowledge of English and U.S. government, is of good moral character, and has fulfilled specific residency requirements);
- Adjudicator recommends approval or denial;
- Supervisor reviews all cases in which a denial is recommended. The supervisor also must review all cases with recommendations to grant citizenship in which:
  - The applicant has a criminal arrest record,
  - The applicant's permanent file is missing and a temporary file was created, or
  - The applicant has applied for a disability waiver.
- Senior immigration officer reviews a quality assurance worksheet to ensure all appropriate steps were taken;
- If application is approved, the database is updated with the decision, and a naturalization certificate is printed; and
- Applicant is notified to appear at oath ceremony.

**Oath Ceremony.** Depending on the laws of each locality, the applicant is sworn in at either a judicial ceremony, which is scheduled by the federal or state court system, or at an administrative ceremony which is scheduled by the local INS office.

**File Close Out.** The local INS office updates database to reflect the applicant's naturalization.

### Unprecedented Surge of Applications

While for the past 30 years INS had been receiving anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000 naturalization applications each year, in FY 1995 application receipts soared to approximately one million. Last year (FY 1997), INS received nearly 1.6 million applications, more than four times the number received in FY 1992. Despite this record increase, there was no parallel increase in staffing to handle the workload.

Moreover, in addition to naturalization applications, the total number of immigration benefit applications received by INS during this same period grew by nearly 60 percent, from 4.1 million to 6.5 million—a record volume that caused further processing delays, whether that be for naturalization, securing a Green Card or obtaining an H1-B visa or any other benefits.

INS has had to quickly mobilize and completely rebuild the naturalization system. INS' existing service structure, which was built to handle a considerably smaller volume, was clogged by the avalanche of applications.

## Rebuilding the System

The rebuilding process began last year by focusing on ensuring integrity and making the system more secure. Some of these efforts have contributed to the delay in processing the pending caseload of applications:

- **New Quality Assurance Procedures.** Beginning in 1997, INS implemented a series of quality assurance procedures to improve the naturalization process by helping to ensure that all applications were being handled in an appropriate and uniform fashion. In December 1997, KPMG Peat Marwick, an independent management consulting and accounting firm, validated the effectiveness of these efforts.
- **New Fingerprinting Requirements and Procedures.** In December 1997, INS reconstructed the entire fingerprinting process to improve its integrity. Instead of relying on private entities for fingerprinting services, INS began implementing new fingerprinting procedures that required naturalization applicants, and eventually all other immigration benefit applicants, to be fingerprinted by INS. Since December, INS has established 120 ASCs in communities across the country to handle this major new requirement and provide convenient service to applicants.

## Major Bottlenecks

**Records Centralization.** Despite INS' significant technological strides, the agency is still reliant on paper case files, with 25 million files located in 80 offices across the country. A major step toward greater efficiency would be centralization of INS paper records. This would allow INS to cut file retrieval time to a matter of a few days from the current time of weeks and sometimes even months. It will result in more timely application processing, not only for naturalization but for all immigration benefits. In November 1997, INS asked Congress to approve a comprehensive plan to move paper records out of district office file rooms into a central facility. As soon as Congress endorses the centralization plan, INS plans to move ahead with this key feature of reengineering.

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## New Management Division to Focus on Improving Service

As part of its commitment to provide more timely, higher quality service to the public, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is combining offices into a new Headquarters division that will focus exclusively on service to individuals seeking citizenship, Green Cards and other immigration benefits. The establishment of this new division is consistent with INS' goal to promote greater accountability and focus in its delivery of immigration services.

### ■ Building a New Foundation

Since it was established 16 months ago, the Office of Naturalization Operations (ONO) has achieved its goal of restoring integrity and credibility to the citizenship process. Building on that important ground work, the agency has decided to incorporate the ongoing, day-to-day management of naturalization under a chain of command that will now be responsible for overseeing all facets of immigration services. This structure will facilitate the close coordination that is essential to building a responsive, customer-oriented organization.

### ■ Bringing Service Delivery Functions Under One Chain of Command

Beginning immediately, INS is establishing a specialized "Immigration Services Division" to focus exclusively on service delivery. The new office, headed by a Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner, will oversee the ongoing citizenship backlog reduction effort and the re-engineering of the processes the agency uses to review and decide cases. Consolidating the responsibility for customer service under a single chain of command will bolster INS efforts to provide consistent, high-quality service at its offices nationwide. The Immigration Services Division will also be responsible for ensuring that the agency's adjudications resources are allocated in the most efficient manner.

### ■ Providing Experienced Leadership

INS Commissioner Doris Meissner has named INS Eastern Regional Director, William (Bill) Yates, to serve as the Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner of the Immigration Services Division on an interim basis until the agency can fill the post permanently. Serving under the head of Immigration Services, the agency plans to designate staff responsible for focusing on naturalization backlog reduction, customer service, adjudications reengineering, and other information and benefits services. The naming of Yates as the Acting Deputy EAC for Immigration Services is consistent with the agency's commitment to put service first. One of the agency's top-level managers, he has an extensive background in customer service. He formerly served as Director of the Vermont Service Center, one of the INS' four highly automated application processing facilities, and he began his 24-year INS career as an immigration adjudicator.

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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## Budget

**1 Q: We understand that you are now projecting a major funding shortfall in your Examinations Fee Account which is funded by benefits applications filed with INS. What is your projected funding shortfall for FY '98?**

**A:** While we initially projected the agency would receive 1.6 million naturalization applications this year, the same number as last year, we now expect that number will be considerably less -- about 850,000. As a result, we anticipate a budget shortfall of approximately \$80 million in FY 1998. To offset this shortfall, we have identified a series of fourth quarter spending cuts. These cuts will be absorbed by Headquarters without affecting naturalization, enforcement or field operations.

**2 Q: Will you have a shortfall for FY '99? If so, what is the projected shortfall?**

**A:** The projected shortfall in FY '99 ranges from 158-170 million dollars depending on when the proposed naturalization fee increase is actually implemented. The new naturalization funding which we are announcing today will provide enhancement resources of \$83 million, as well as funding (\$88 million) to partially offset this deficit. We will undergo a series of budgetary reviews during FY 99 to identify funding to offset the remaining deficit, and ensure that there is minimal impact on critical programs.

**3 Q: If the funding shortfall is caused, at least in part, by a dramatic reduction in the numbers of applications being filed with INS, what is the reason for the decline?**

**A:** The pool of prospective eligible citizens increased dramatically beginning in 1994 when the first of the 2.7 million aliens legalized under IRCA became eligible. In addition, the volume of naturalization applications has increased from 1994 through 1997 due to a number of factors, including the Green Card Replacement Program and legislative efforts to restrict public benefits for non-citizens. The recent legislative changes restoring many welfare reform cutbacks probably reduced the demand for naturalization among those who might have applied for citizenship in response to potential cutbacks. There is also evidence now that the annual number of naturalization applications filed by IRCA legalized aliens has peaked and will continue to decrease each year.

**4 Q: Why weren't you able to predict this decline?**

**A:** Projecting application levels for immigration benefits has always been problematic because of the volatile nature of when and why people apply for various benefits. While our naturalization receipts showed an initial decline beginning early this fiscal year, immigrant advocacy groups and our district offices were indicating that there were potentially thousands of applicants who were expected to file applications this fiscal year. Because of that disparity, it was difficult to confirm that the downturn in receipts we began seeing earlier this year was in fact a trend until recently.

**5 Q: What are your projected receipts for FY 98? For FY 99?**

**A:** INS estimates it will receive approximately 850,000 naturalization applications this year (FY 98) and roughly 700,000 in FY 1999 and 700,000 in FY 2000.

**6 Q: If the number of applications for immigration-related benefits is declining, why are you asking Congress for more money?**

**A:** We have never received sufficient resources to fully address the naturalization backlog. Of the \$211 million INS received in FY 98 for new initiatives, only \$14 million was allocated for backlog reduction. The remainder of that funding was primarily used to improve the integrity of the naturalization system. The \$211 million allowed us to convert 400 temporary adjudicators to term adjudicators, enabling us to retain them for four years. However, INS has never received new, permanent staff to address the increasing backlogs.

What's more, the \$95 fee collected from naturalization applicants does not come close to covering the cost of processing those applications. Based on our recent fee study, the actual cost of processing a citizenship application is \$225. This shortfall was temporarily offset by the collection of penalties from the 245(i) applicants, but the fees have not been available since January 1, 1997 for exams-related spending.

**7 Q: Since 1993 you have asked for 179 percent increase in INS funding. For FY 99 alone, a request of over 4 billion dollars was made by the Service, 10 percent higher than in 1998. It seems that the money continues to grow a faster rate than naturalization requests and that service continues to deteriorate. How do you explain that?**

**A:** While INS' budget has grown dramatically, the vast majority of new resources have gone to fund enforcement efforts. In fact, the amount of funding allocated for service-related improvements is one fourth that earmarked for enforcement. This year, INS added \$211 million to the budget to begin overhauling the naturalization system. That funding which was used to bolster the integrity of the system and to begin decreasing the backlog and waiting time for individuals seeking citizenship.

**8 Q: What portion of the INS budget is allocated for naturalization purposes?**

**A:** The estimated expenditures for the Naturalization program for FY 95 - 99 are:

FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999*
\$75.4 million	\$171.3 million	\$106.9 million	\$305.5 million	\$397.2 million

\* Includes \$83 million for naturalization initiatives

**9 Q: Congress allowed you to use \$14 million in funds to address the backlog. How is that being used?**

**A:** The funds given to INS by Congress to reduce the naturalization backlog are being spent on a variety of initiatives. As of July 14, \$10 million of the Naturalization Backlog Reduction Project (NBRP) funds have been distributed. That money is being used to pay employee overtime, to bring on board stay-in-school students, clerical support, and to rehire retired

immigration officers. It is also helping pay for the expansion of existing facilities, the movement and set up of files, and other naturalization-related needs. The majority of funds distributed so far have been spent on current INS employees, including \$2.8 million for employee details and more than \$2.5 million for overtime.

**10 Q: What part of the added resources in FY 1999 will have to approve?**

**A:** Congress must approve this funding through INS' normal reprogramming process.

**11 Q: Why will wait times only drop to 10-12 months even with new money?**

**A:** In March 1998, INS testified that, at the end of FY 1999, the projected processing time for citizenship applications would be 10-12 months. This projection was based on retaining all current base and enhancement funding. Even with the new funding announced today, and the implementation of the proposed fee increase in the future, it will take the better part of a year before we can recruit, hire, and fully train the additional personnel needed to reduce the processing times further. The bottom line is that we anticipate it will be June of 1999 before we see a significant increase production as a result of the new personnel these funds will enable us to bring on board. Similarly, it was not until June of 1998 that we saw the results of adding new personnel.

**12 Q: What is the new fee waiver policy?**

**A:** INS is in the process of preparing field guidance on the processing of fee waivers. That guidance will take effect at the time the first fee increases takes effect. Currently, District Directors have broad discretion in granting these fee waivers. The new guidance will provide more specific parameters about the circumstances under which these waivers should be approved. While INS is sensitive to the financial hardships faced by some of its customers, the agency is also required by law to recover the full processing costs of certain applications for immigration benefits, including naturalization.

**12A Q: Why aren't you doing a regulation, why only field guidance?**

**A:** We want the flexibility to make sure than when we more forward with a regulation, that we are sure it is the right way to go.

### **Management Changes**

**13 Q: With Bill Yates on detail to Headquarters, who is acting Regional Director in Eastern Region?**

**A:** Michael Devine.

**14 Q: How long will Mr. Yates be assigned to Headquarters?**

**A:** The duration of Bill Yates' detail to HQ has not yet been determined.

**15 Q: Would you consider recruiting from outside the agency for new people.**

**A.** Yes. This position requires the kinds of skills which may be found within INS, but also could be found among executives within the public and private sector who have run service or benefits-oriented operations. We will be casting a wide net for good candidates.

**16 Q: What is the scope of authority for this new position?**

**A.** The new Immigration Services director will have full responsibility and be accountable for all aspects of adjudication operations which includes backlog reduction and customer service, reengineering naturalization and other benefits-related processes, and administering telephone, fingerprinting, and service center operations. This position will have direct line authority over district operations as part of field operations.

## **Backlog Reduction**

**17 Q: What is your current naturalization backlog?**

**A:** Presently there are an estimated 1.9 million naturalization applications pending.

**18 Q: How is INS attacking the backlog?**

**A:** INS has instituted numerous steps to reduce the backlog. Some of the initiatives, already in place or soon to be implemented, include:

- Developing backlog reduction plans in all 33 of INS' district offices to identify and eliminate processing bottlenecks. At selected offices, special teams have been put in place to tackle the difficult cases and take steps to put the "old cases" back on track.
- Dedicating more personnel and resources to the naturalization effort - re-hiring experienced, retired INS officers; detailing asylum officers to process naturalization cases; and hiring additional clerks to decrease processing time.
- Implementing process improvements such as direct mail and the Application Support Centers to increase efficiency and reduce delays.
- Working closely with community-based organizations and other external groups to ensure that the process improvements are having a positive impact on applicants.

**19 Q: In spite of your publicized efforts to improve service to applicants, backlogs in benefits applications continue to increase. At the same time, you are asking for dramatic increases in fees for these applications. Aren't you asking customers to pay more money for much slower service?**

**A:** A comprehensive study in 1997 concluded that INS has not been charging as much as it costs to process each naturalization application. This has ultimately shortchanged our ability to properly fund the system. Commissioner Meissner has said that while we knew the fee must be raised, she did not want to do so until key benchmarks have been passed:

- Progress in case backlog,
- Opening of all new Application Support Centers,
- Uniform use of the direct mail process, and
- Installation of new software to process all incoming naturalization applications.

**Q and A - Naturalization**

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We are now tackling backlog reduction and the difficult issues of how to further improve customer service and timeliness. With the infusion of the new resources we announced today, we will be well on the road to meeting the needs of frustrated customers who have been waiting too long. It should also be noted that the naturalization fee has not been significantly adjusted in many years.

**20 Q: How long will an applicant for naturalization or adjustment of status have to wait if they file today?**

**A:** Historically, INS' goal has been to complete every naturalization application within 6 months of filing. However, the unprecedented increase in new applications filed in the past few years has resulted in increases in the number of pending applications in FY 1997 and FY 1998. Although INS processed significantly greater numbers of applications in the last several years than it has historically, receipts far outdistanced completions, making the six month goal unlikely under any circumstances. The average actual wait time experienced by applicants naturalized in June 1998 was 16 months and 12 months for adjustment of status.

**21 Q: Are you still planning to move forward with a fee increase--even though you haven't had much movement on the backlog?**

**A:** Yes, we are still planning to move forward with the fee increase; however, the fee increase for naturalization will be delayed until January 15, 1999. INS is required to recover the full cost of processing certain immigration benefits applications from the applicants through fees. We know that for the last several years, we have not been charging citizenship applicants as much as it costs to process each application. That disparity has ultimately hampered our ability to properly fund the system.

**22 Q: What is the status of Robert Bratt who had been the Director of Naturalization Operations until March. Is he officially working somewhere else? Jim Angus has been Acting Director of ONO. What will be his status?**

**A:** Bob Bratt provided exceptional service to INS as head of ONO. In 12 months he was able to significantly improve the naturalization process by implementing a series of enhancements and positioning INS to successfully pass an extensive audit of its quality procedures. Mr. Bratt returned to DOJ in early March due to Office of Inspector General proceedings not related to his INS service. During Mr. Bratt's absence, James Angus continued with the reforms put into place, and has served very capably as Acting Director of ONO. We value his contributions and expect that he will continue to serve in Immigration Services during the transition and beyond that.

**23 Q: What are you doing to expedite those applications submitted by people with disabilities requesting exceptions from the English and Civics tests.**

**A:** In an effort to provide more timely and consistent decisions for naturalization applicants with medical disabilities, INS and U.S. Public Health Service began a pilot program August 3 in the three INS districts offices with the largest volume of these cases. During the pilot project, USPHS will provide medical officers to each of the three district offices which have been receiving the largest number of citizenship applications accompanied by N-648s, Medical

Certification for Disability Exception. USPHS officers working with adjudicators in the district offices will provide a wide range of services, assisting with the following:

- Reviewing N-648s to ensure all information is complete and sufficient to make a fair decision;
- Following up on requests to community physicians for additional information, when required;
- Helping INS adjudicators with medical terminology most often encountered on N-648s;
- Preparing a medical certification manual for adjudicators that will outline and further explain common disabilities;
- Providing on-site review and training at the sub-offices within the Los Angeles, Miami, and New York Districts;
- Providing a final assessment after completion of the three-month pilot project in order to help INS determine how the program should be continued.

**24 Q: How many citizenship applications do you think INS will ultimately process this year?**

**A:** INS expects to process a total of 637,000 citizenship applications in FY 1998. The projections for FY 1999 will depend on the amount of funding available for naturalization that year; however, based on the funding announced today we anticipate 1.5 million completions.

**25 Q: A number of cities and counties have come forward to offer help with workers. Why hasn't INS taken advantage of those offers?**

**A.** INS has received a number of offers from cities and counties and has aggressively pursued every offer. To date, we have an agreement in Santa Clara County, California, and are working on an additional agreement with the City of San Francisco. A number of cities have expressed interest but have been unable to conclude agreements.

**26 Q: What happened with the idea to hire retired adjudication officers to help with the backlog? Are you still considering hiring these people?**

**A:** A portion of the \$14 million in funds to address the backlog has been utilized to hire retired adjudication officers and clerks.

## **Citizenship Re-engineering**

**27 Q: Outside consultants have recommended a host of changes designed to make the citizenship process more secure and efficient. How many of those changes have you put into place and what is the timeline for implementing future changes?**

**A.** Elements of Re-engineering INS has already implemented:

- In-house fingerprinting program (Application Support Centers)
- Direct Mail of all N-400s to four Service Centers
- Development of single case processing systems - CLAIMS 4

- Installed CLADMS 4 at four Service Centers and commenced installation at four large districts (NYC, Newark, Miami, Chicago)
- Internet access to naturalization information, N-400, information on eligibility, NATZ News, sample citizenship test
- Developed and began distribution of free PC-based software for N-400 application
- Developed records centralization strategy that is awaiting Congressional approval
- Pilot with the Public Health Service to improve disability waiver processing

#### **Elements of Re-engineering Under Development**

- New N-400 application for naturalization and eligibility worksheet
- New guide to naturalization
- Implementation plan for comprehensive National Phone Center
- Convening a testing advisory group
- Piloting live-scan fingerprint transmission directly to FBI (Spokane)
- Piloting complete file review at Service Centers to ensure efficient adjudication at district office
- Additional information on Internet including the ability to check application status on-line
- Standard operating procedures at Service Centers for high volume applications

**28 Q: How has the Direct Mail program contributed to reducing the naturalization backlog? Have you seen any encouraging results?**

**A:** The use of direct mail shifted the responsibility for handling the mail and data entry to the agency's highly-automated Service Centers, allowing the district offices to focus their clerical and adjudications resources on completing current cases.

**29 Q: Do you expect to see any results in the future?**

**A:** Yes. Direct mail is a major element of INS' effort to streamline the front-end processing of naturalization applications and, combined with increased automation, will help to reduce processing times.

### **Productivity**

**30 Q: How do you explain that even with the additional funding you received from Congress in November, the agency will process fewer naturalization applications this year than last year?**

**A:** INS has focused this fiscal year on a two-pronged approach to naturalization: fundamental restructuring of the naturalization process and improving the production capacity of offices for cases already in progress. Restructuring efforts completed this year include:

- the institutionalization of quality assurance measures, designed to enhance integrity and standardize the citizenship process;
- the development and implementation of an in-house fingerprint program, including the opening of 119 Application Support Centers and 35 mobile routes;

- the implementation of Direct Mail for all new naturalization applications so that they are mailed to one of four service centers rather than to one of 80 offices; and
- the development and deployment of a single case processing and tracking system to the four service centers and 7 largest INS district offices.

**31 Q: How do you respond to the charge that you are asking for more money to do less work?**

**A:** For several years, we were actually doing the work at about half the full cost. Even with the unprecedented number of applications, the incoming fees could not support the workload in the short term, much less the full cost of making improvements for the long term. Moreover, INS is required to recover the full cost of processing certain types of immigration benefits applications, including those for citizenship.

The public also needs to understand that the measures we have instituted within the past year to restore integrity to the naturalization system have increased the amount of time it takes to process these applications. We are confident, however, that the recent re-engineering initiatives we have instituted, together with the new resources we are dedicating to naturalization, will enable us to make the system both timelier and friendlier.

**32 Q: What were the completions (oaths and denials) servicewide in the top five cities in FY 1993, 94, 95, 96, 97 and through 3rd quarter (June) in FY 1998, along with the percentage changes from year to year?**

**A:** See attached chart.

**33 Q: Commissioner Meissner has said the agency was on track to complete around 60,000 cases in June – did you meet these projections?**

**A:** The agency projected it would complete 58,453 naturalization applications in June. The service completed 54,341 cases or 93% of our projections. The agency did surpass its goal for the number of interviews conducted. The completion goals were not met due to a variety of reasons including problems with new systems and bringing additional staff on board.

**34 Q: What are the September projections, and are you on track to meet them?**

**A:** The agency projects we will complete 99,044 naturalization cases in September. We are on track to meet these projections.

**35 Q: Is this a one-time event, or are you expecting to ask for appropriated resources in the future?**

**A:** This is a one-time funding to adjust a shortfall in revenue and begin to reengineer the naturalization process. Although we cannot guarantee that we would never seek appropriated funds for this purpose in the future, this is a one-time event to solve the immediate problem in FY 1999 based on receipt levels and anticipated productivity improvements. Additional appropriated resources are not envisioned at this time.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

to

**Department of Justice  
Office of Management and Budget  
The United States House of Representatives**

April 15, 1999

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

Page 2

Data: March 1999

**Summary of Backlog Reduction Activity**

During February 1999, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS or the Service) received 22,677 applications for naturalization, fewer than 10 percent of the applications it received during January (253,105). At this time, the INS has not changed its official projection of 703,602 applications for naturalization to be received during FY 1999. In the next 2 months, the INS will reproject the total naturalization receipts for FY 1999, once the Service can analyze receipt data for the months following the fee increase.

The INS completed almost three times the number of naturalization applications it received (64,460), but still completed 7 percent fewer than it had during January 1999. The number of pending applications decreased from 2,032,279 at the end of January to 1,991,460 at the end of February.

The Projected Processing Time decreased from 25 months at the end of January to 24 months at the end of February. The INS expects the projected processing time to rise next month as a result of the increased number of cases received in January and a decreased 3-month completion average.

The INS has had significant difficulty hiring and retaining nonpermanent staff for the 600 term adjudications officer positions (400 authorized through the 1998 Appropriations Act; 200 authorized through the 1999 Appropriations Act). The INS has been hardest hit in the offices in major metropolitan areas; offices which account for more than half of the INS' current pending level of naturalization casework. By allowing these offices to hire permanent staff, the INS will reduce its high turnover rate and improve its ability to complete naturalization applications. On March 23, the INS requested that the Department of Justice (DOJ) allow the conversion of 300 term District Adjudications Officers (DAOs) to permanent positions. This request was granted on April 6.

**Summary of Achievements for March 1999**

During March 1999, the INS achieved the following milestones for initiatives described in the Conference Report:

**Preparation and Service****Records Centralization**

- Files and Forms Management (HQFFM) provided the final design specification for the INS National Records Center (NRC) to General Services Administration (GSA) to initiate negotiations for the lease.
- Began recruiting INS core staff.

**National Customer Service Center (NCSC)**

- The Deputy Commissioner approved the strategic plan for the NCSC (March 25, 1999).

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

Page 3

Data: March 1999

Citizenship TestingNaturalization Testing Pilot at Application Support Centers (ASCs)

- Completed report on results of the testing pilot at ASCs.

Information TechnologyCLAIMS 4

- Deployed CLAIMS 4 to Tampa, Florida; Honolulu, Hawaii; Orlando, Florida; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

AdjudicationDisability Exceptions Processing

- Revised Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions was approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (March 22, 1999).

Complete (Pre-Adjudication) File Review

- The Service Centers have selected candidates for 75 of the 100 Immigration Information Officer (IIO) positions. Of the 75, 29 are on-board, 25 have cleared security, 20 are pending security clearance, and 1 has declined the position.

Citizenship Audit and ReviewOngoing Naturalization Reviews

- Transmitted the Report on Transition Review to the Justice Management Division, DOJ (March 5, 1999). Recommendations based on the findings of the report will be integrated into the Service's quality assurance review process.

## Other Milestones Achieved in March

Backlog Reduction

- Of the 200 term DAOs allocated to the field, approximately 60 percent have been selected. The INS expected that more DAOs would be selected by this time, and believes that its hiring efforts are hindered by the challenges of recruiting and retaining nonpermanent staff in the current job market. The INS believes that the conversion of 300 term DAOs to permanent status will improve its recruitment efforts.
- Of the 357 contract clerical staff authorized, 72 percent are on-board. For the 100 positions still open, 135 applications have been submitted for security clearance. Almost half of the unfilled positions are in Districts that historically have had problems recruiting and maintaining nonpermanent staff.

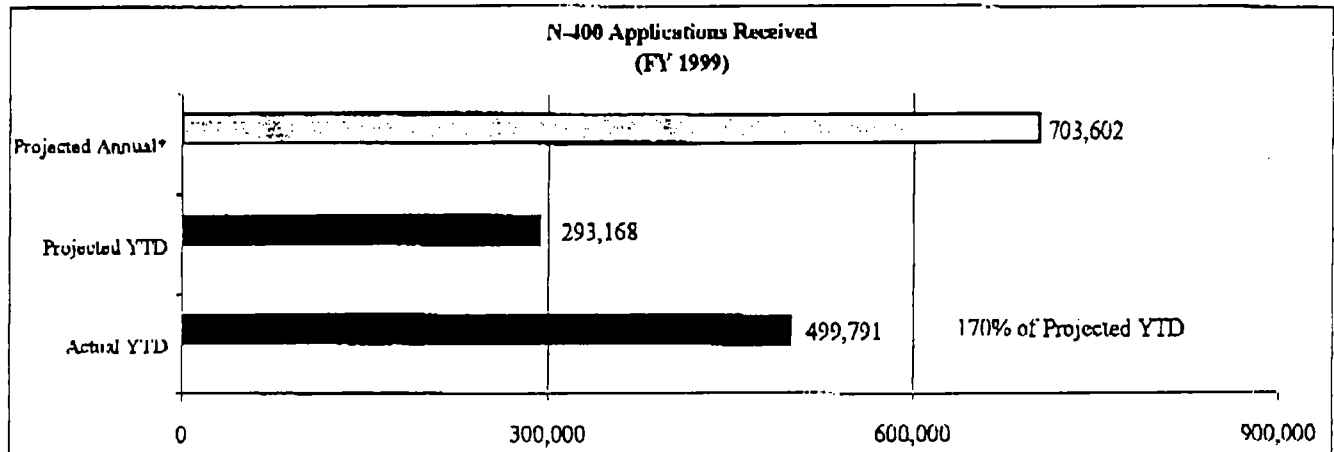
Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Nicaraguans and Hondurans

- Began fingerprinting applicants (March 22, 1999).

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

Page 4

Data: February 1999

**Part I. Immigration Services Caseload Processing Status****Naturalization Applications (N-400) (FY 1999)**

\*Projected Annual number of N-400 Applications Received is based on INS official projections as of July 14, 1998, by the Exams Fee Group.

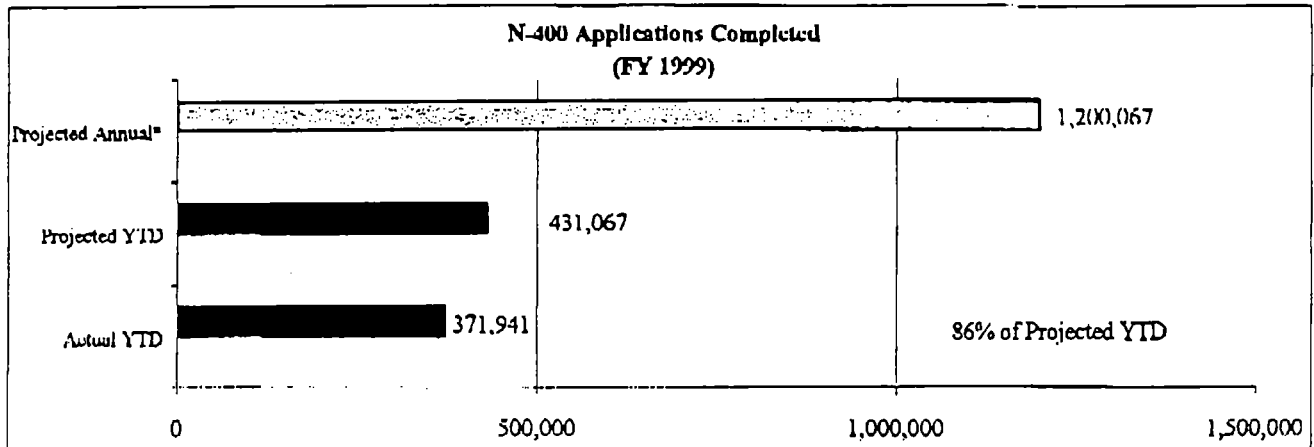
Note: Applications Received includes those applications received by the INS but not yet data-entered.

- During February 1999, the INS received 22,677 applications for naturalization, a 91 percent decrease from the previous month (253,105).
- Though the Exams Fee Group met on March 18, 1999, it did not reproject N-400 receipts for FY 1999 at that time. In the next 2 months, the INS will reproject the total naturalization receipts for FY 1999 once the Service can analyze receipt data for the months following the fee increase.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

**Naturalization Applications (N-400) (FY 1999)**

\* Projected Annual number of N-400 Applications Completed is based on projections as of January 1999.

- During February 1999, the INS completed 64,460 applications for naturalization, a 7 percent decrease from the previous month. The Service's completions during February 1999 were 46 percent greater than the number completed in February 1998 (44,024).

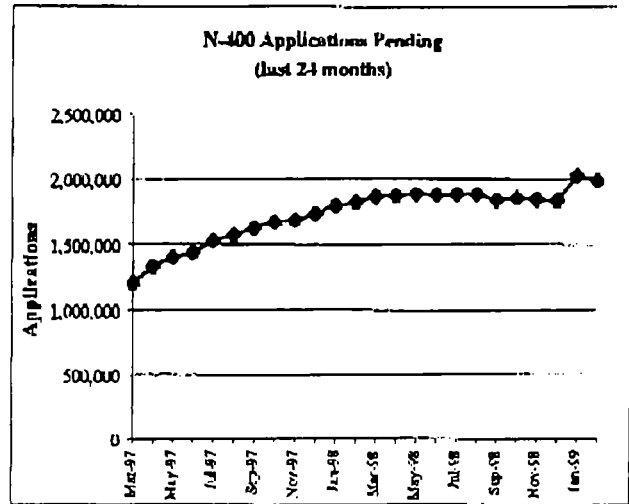
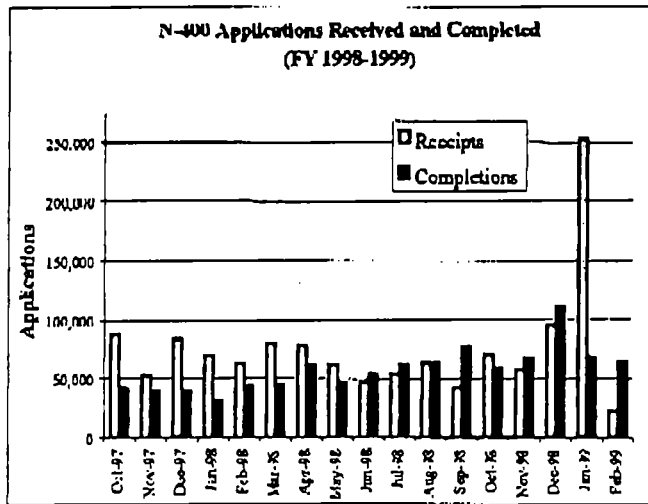
Staffing for Backlog Reduction

- During December 1998, the INS allocated extensive overtime funding to fund clerical processing, including close-out of cases. Contract clerical staff were to assume these responsibilities beginning in calendar year 1999. As of March 31, 1999, 72 percent of the 357 authorized contract clerical staff were on-board.
- Of the 200 term DAOs allocated to the field, approximately 60 percent have been selected.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

Data: February 1999

Naturalization Applications (N-400) (FY 1999)



Note: Applications received and pending include those applications received by the INS, but not yet data-entered.

	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98	Jan-99	Feb-99	Mar-99	Apr-99	May-99	Jun-99	Jul-99	Aug-99	Sep-99	FYTD
<i>Projected Completions</i>													
Projectal YTD*	59,775	63,779	114,513	95,000	96,000	99,000	105,000	105,000	105,000	115,000	120,000	120,000	431,057
<i>Actual Activity for FY 1998**</i>													
Completions	59,775	67,668	110,619	68,419	64,460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	371,281
Receipts	62,914	58,049	96,046	253,105	22,677	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	469,791
Pending	1,856,008	1,849,853	1,836,715	2,032,279	1,991,460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,991,460

\*Projections as of January 1999. Total completions are projected at 1.2 million for FY 1999.

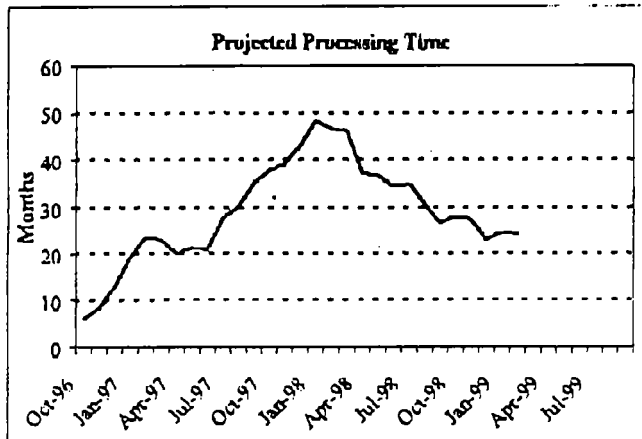
\*\*Source: PAS data as of March 24, 1999.

- The number of pending applications for naturalization decreased by 2 percent from the end of January 1999 to the end of February 1999.
- The change in the pending count of applications is determined by the difference between receipts and completions as well as other factors. These other factors include: differences between transfer data, adjustments based on system reports or on physical audits of case holdings, and estimations of frontlog.
- The INS implemented the National File Audit in most offices by the end of December 1998. As the INS analyzes the audit reports, validates results, and reconciles errors during the next several months, the INS expects pending counts to change.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

**Naturalization Applications (N-400) (FY 1999)**

*Average Waiting Time (Retrospective):* Most applications completed during February were filed approximately 19 months ago. This estimate is based on aggregating District Office reports of their estimated waiting times. The INS is developing standard procedures to calculate the N-400 waiting times, and plans to implement the new reporting system in several months.

*Projected Processing Time (Prospective):* Most applicants filing during the month of March can expect to wait, on average, 24 months from filing to completion based on current pending levels and the last 3 months' average level of completions.

- The Servicewide Average Waiting Time remained constant at 19 months.
- The Servicewide average Projected Processing Time for naturalization applications decreased 4 percent from the previous month (from 25 months to 24 months) chiefly because of the low number of naturalization applications received during February 1999.
- The INS uses the projected processing time calculation to measure its progress in meeting the stated 12-month end of fiscal year processing time goal.

Variations in processing times<sup>1</sup>

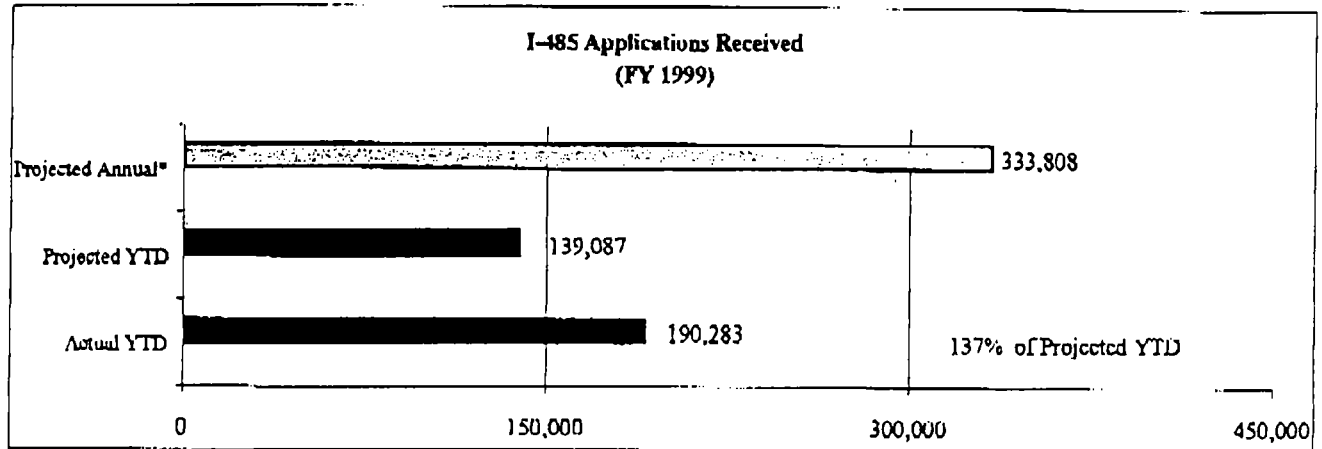
- *Average waiting time.* Reported waiting times for individual offices may vary significantly from each other and from the national average. The average reported above is a weighted aggregate of all offices reporting. Because average waiting times are reported based on applicants already naturalized, and does not take into account the effect of planned improvements, this measure may not correlate to future performance.
- *Projected processing time.* Projected processing times can vary significantly from month to month and from the average waiting time. Projected processing times are computed based on the current level of pending applications and the average level of completions during the last 3 months. Because projected processing times are computed based on past completion levels and do not consider the effect of planned improvements on completions, this measure may not correlate to waiting times actually experienced by applicants in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Both *average waiting time* and *projected processing time* measures have been used by the INS historically as methods to report the estimated time necessary for applicants to wait for naturalization.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

***Adjustment of Status Applications (I-485) (FY 1999)***

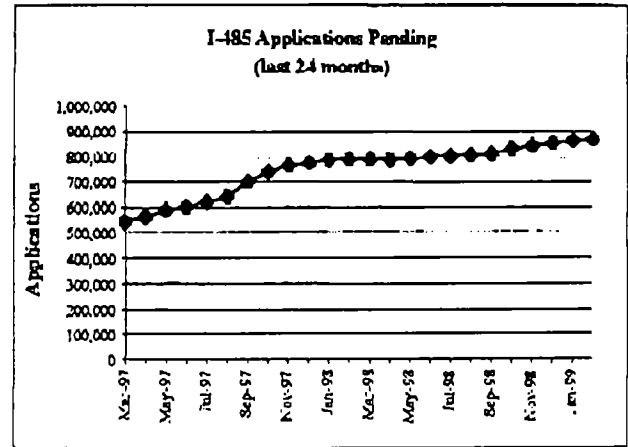
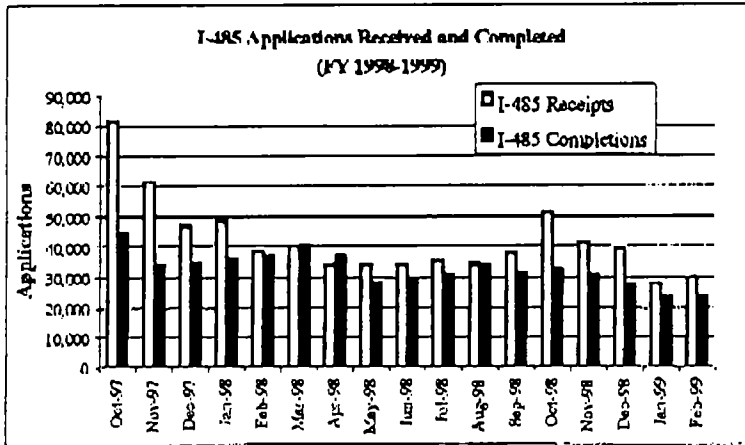
\*Projected Annual number of I-485 Applications received is based on INS official projections made on July 14, 1998, by the Exams Fee Group. The Exams Fee Group met again on March 18, 1999; revised projections for I-485 applications from that meeting will be included in the next report.

- During February 1999, the INS received 8 percent more adjustment of status applications than it projected.
- During the first 5 months of FY 1999, the INS received 37 percent more adjustment of status applications than it projected.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

Data: February 1999

**Adjustment of Status Applications (I-485) (FY 1999)**



	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98	Jan-99	Feb-99	Mar-99	Apr-99	May-99	Jun-99	Jul-99	Aug-99	Sep-99	FYTD
<b>Actual Activity for FY 1999*</b>													
Receipts	51,478	41,300	39,429	28,136	29,940	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	190,283
Completions	32,208	30,836	27,574	23,598	23,861	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	138,077
Pending	831,489	842,995	853,417	862,616	866,512	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	866,512

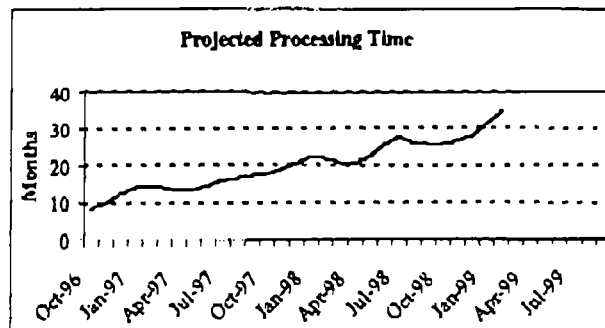
\*Source: PAS data as of March 24, 1999.

- During February 1999, the INS completed 23,861 adjustment of status applications, a 1 percent increase from the previous month.
- The INS received more adjustment of status applications than it completed during February 1999.
- The number of pending adjustment of status applications increased less than 1 percent from the end of January 1999 to the end of February 1999.
- The change in the pending count of applications is determined by the difference between receipts and completions as well as other factors. These other factors include: differences between transfer data and adjustments based on system reports or on physical audits of case holdings.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

*Adjustment of Status Applications (I-485) (FY 1999)*

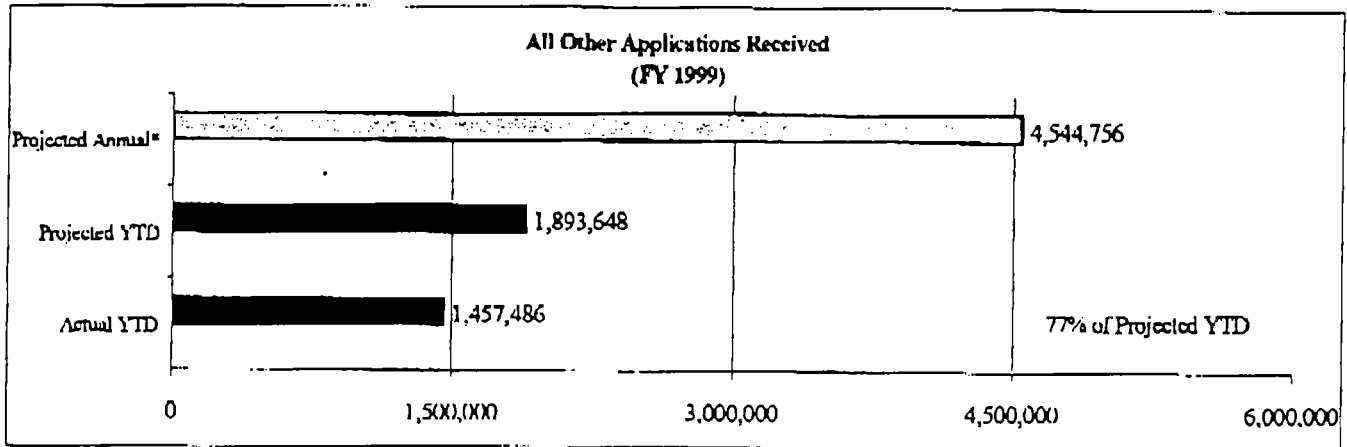
*Projected Processing Time (Prospective):* Most applicants filing during the month of March can expect to wait, on average, 35 months from filing to completion based on current pending levels and the last 3 months' average level of completions.

- The Servicewide average Projected Processing Time for adjustment of status applications increased by 3 months from the previous month (from 32 to 35 months).

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

*All Other Applications and Petitions for Immigration Benefits (FY 1999)*

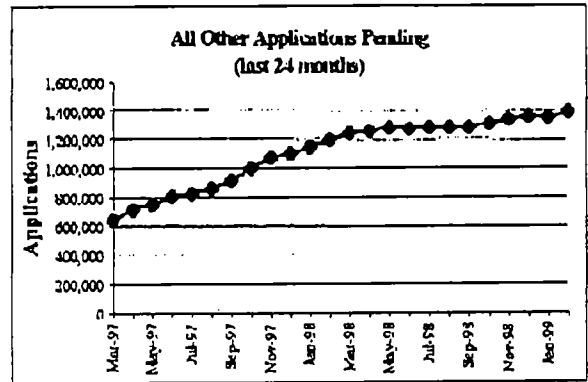
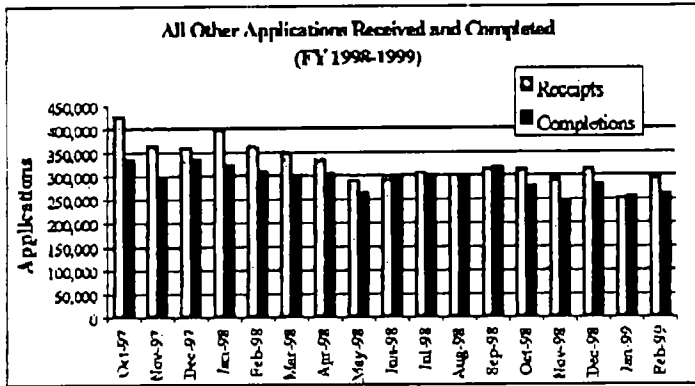
\*Projected Annual number of All Other Applications Received is based on INS official projections as of July 14, 1998, by the Exams Fee Group. The Exams Fee Group met again on March 18, 1999; revised projections for "All Other" from that meeting will be included in the next report.

- During February 1999, the INS received 23 percent fewer applications than projected. During the first 5 months of FY 1999, the INS received 77 percent of the applications it projected.
- "All Other Applications" includes such applications as I-765, Application for Employment Authorization; I-130, Petition for Alien Relative; I-600/600A, Orphan Petitions; and I-821, Temporary Protected Status. It does not include N-400s or I-485s.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report Page 12

Data: February 1999

**All Other Applications and Petitions for Immigration Benefits (FY 1999)**



	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98	Jan-99	Feb-99	Mar-99	Apr-99	May-99	Jun-99	Jul-99	Aug-99	Sep-99	FYTD
<b>Actual Activity for FY 1999*</b>													
Receipts	312,003	290,532	313,090	250,693	291,168	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,457,486
Completions	276,787	248,712	279,166	253,367	259,321	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,317,353
Pending	1,304,596	1,338,752	1,358,324	1,350,487	1,389,649	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,389,649

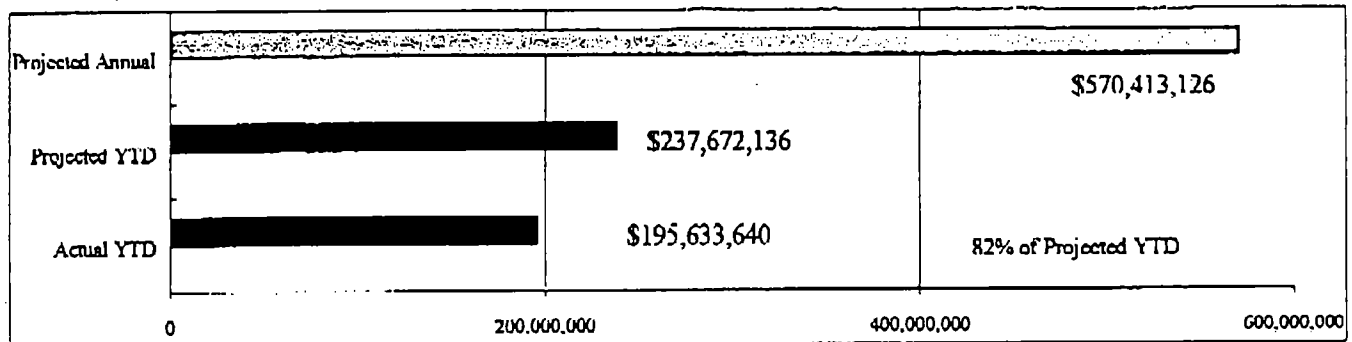
\*Source: PAS data as of March 24, 1999.

- During February 1999, the INS completed fewer applications than it received, but completed 2 percent more than during January.
- The number of pending applications increased by 3 percent from the end of January 1999 to the end of February 1999.
- The change in the pending count of applications is determined by the difference between receipts and completions as well as other factors. These other factors include: differences between transfer data and adjustments based on system reports or on physical audits of case holdings.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

**Part II. Financial Status for Immigration Services****Revenue (Examinations Fee Account)\* (FY 1999)**

\*Includes revenue from all program sources deposited in the Exams Fee Account. Projected Annual Revenue is based on INS official application receipt projections made on July 14, 1998, by the Exams Fee Group. The Exams Fee Group met again on March 18, 1999, revised projections on revenue from that meeting will be included in the next report. These revised projections may change again after projections are revised for N-400 receipts.

- The collections through the month of February have been lower than projected due in large part to a backlog of deposit transactions that had not been keyed into the Financial Accounting Control System (FACS). The Administrative Center Burlington Finance Office is currently keying in the backlog of deposits; these transactions will be reflected in the next report.
- During March 1999, the INS began working to reconcile FACS against application receipts by location. The data from the chart above reflects partial resolution of the discrepancy. Efforts to fully resolve the discrepancies from data sources continue.

**Obligation by Program (All Accounts, Dollars in thousands)**

	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98	Jan-99	Feb-99	Mar-99	Apr-99	May-99	Jun-99	Jul-99	Aug-99	Sep-99	Actual YTD
Inspections	\$1,147	\$1,744	\$1,578	\$1,562	\$1,518	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$7,549
Investigations	\$304	\$937	\$558	\$1,047	\$548	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$3,394
Intelligence	\$69	\$115	\$89	\$101	\$82	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$456
Adj & Natz	\$12,632	\$26,687	\$36,668	\$31,533	\$17,898	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$123,418
Adj & Natz SAE	\$88	\$105	\$149	\$20,002	-\$202	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$20,142
International	\$2,889	\$5,448	\$4,610	\$8,962	\$4,270	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$26,179
Training	\$97	\$157	\$123	\$120	\$135	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$632
Data & Comm	\$236	\$574	\$4,404	\$4,563	\$2,828	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$12,605
Info & Records	\$2,498	\$6,882	\$13,130	\$10,633	\$16,180	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$49,323
Construction	\$3	\$7	\$4	\$8	\$4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$26
Legal	\$437	\$739	\$568	\$763	\$603	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$3,110
Mgmt & Admin	\$485	\$1,035	\$659	\$1,071	\$600	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$3,850
Actual Total*	\$20,885	\$44,430	\$62,540	\$80,365	\$44,464	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$252,684

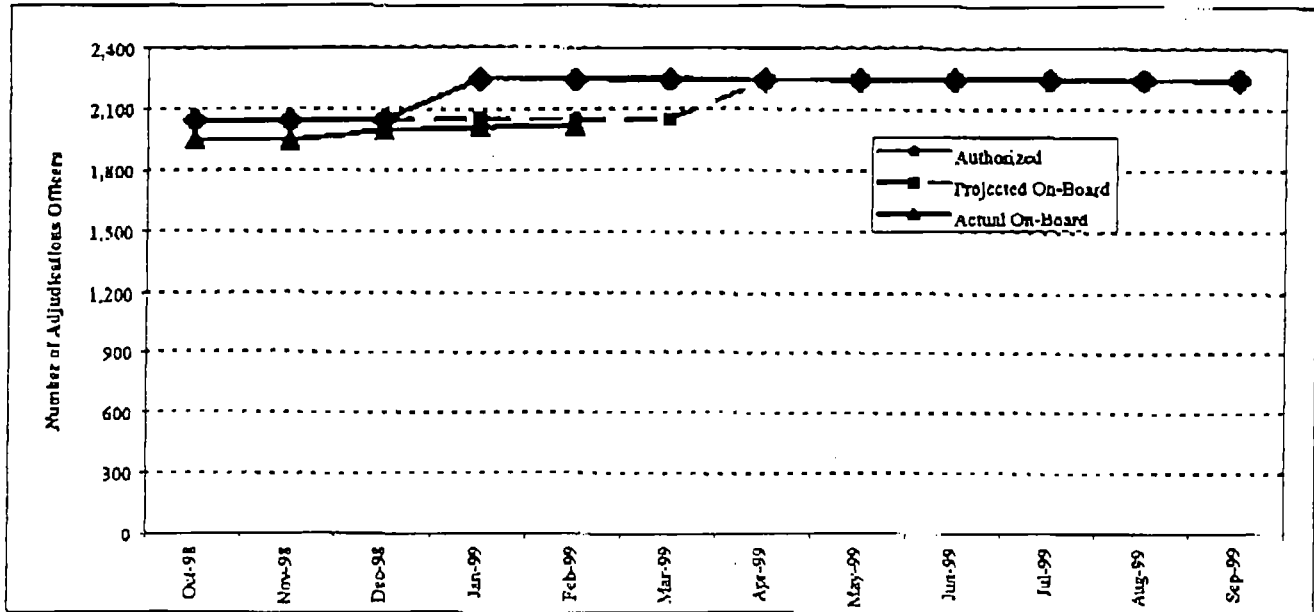
\*Obligations for Legalization have been moved into the Exams Fee Account.

- Obligations are funded from the Exams Fee Account (\$635.7 million) and Salaries and Expenses (SAE) Account (\$176 million). Actual total year to date obligations include \$233 million in the Exams Fee Account and \$20 million for the Adjudications and Naturalization program in the SAE account.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: February 1999

**Part III. Immigration Services Staffing Status**

	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98	Jan-99	Feb-99	Mar-99	Apr-99	May-99	Jun-99	Jul-99	Aug-99	Sep-99
<b>District Adjudications Officers (Permanent)</b>												
Authorized	1,213	1,213	1,213	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214
Projected On-Board	1,213	1,213	1,213	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214
Actual On-Board	1,201	1,197	1,207	1,215	1,214	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Service Center Adjudications Officers (Permanent)</b>												
Authorized	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433
Projected On-Board	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433	433
Actual On-Board	422	424	427	428	427	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>District Adjudications Officers (Term Enhancement Positions from FY 1998 and FY 1999 Appropriation Acts)<sup>a</sup></b>												
Authorized	400	400	400	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600
Projected On-Board*	400	400	400	400	400	400	600	600	600	600	600	600
Actual On-Board	323	326	359	365	375	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Adjudications Officers</b>												
Authorized	2,046	2,046	2,046	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247
Projected On-Board	2,046	2,046	2,046	2,047	2,047	2,047	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247
Actual On-Board	1,946	1,947	1,993	2,008	2,016	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: The INS also employs temporary staff as funding permits; temporary staff are not reflected in this chart.

\*The INS estimates that the majority of the 200 term adjudicators will be on-board by April. Because the adjudicators must be trained, they are not expected to be fully productive until June.

- The total number of on-board adjudications officers is 98 percent of the number projected for February 1999, approximately the same as January 1999.
- On March 23, 1999, the INS requested that DOJ allow the conversion of 300 term DAOs to permanent positions. This request was made in an effort to reduce the high turnover rate in nonpermanent staffing for DAOs, a phenomenon that the INS believes affects its ability to reach and maintain a high production level. The request was approved on April 6, 1999.

Immigration Services Benefits Processing Status Report

Data: March 1999

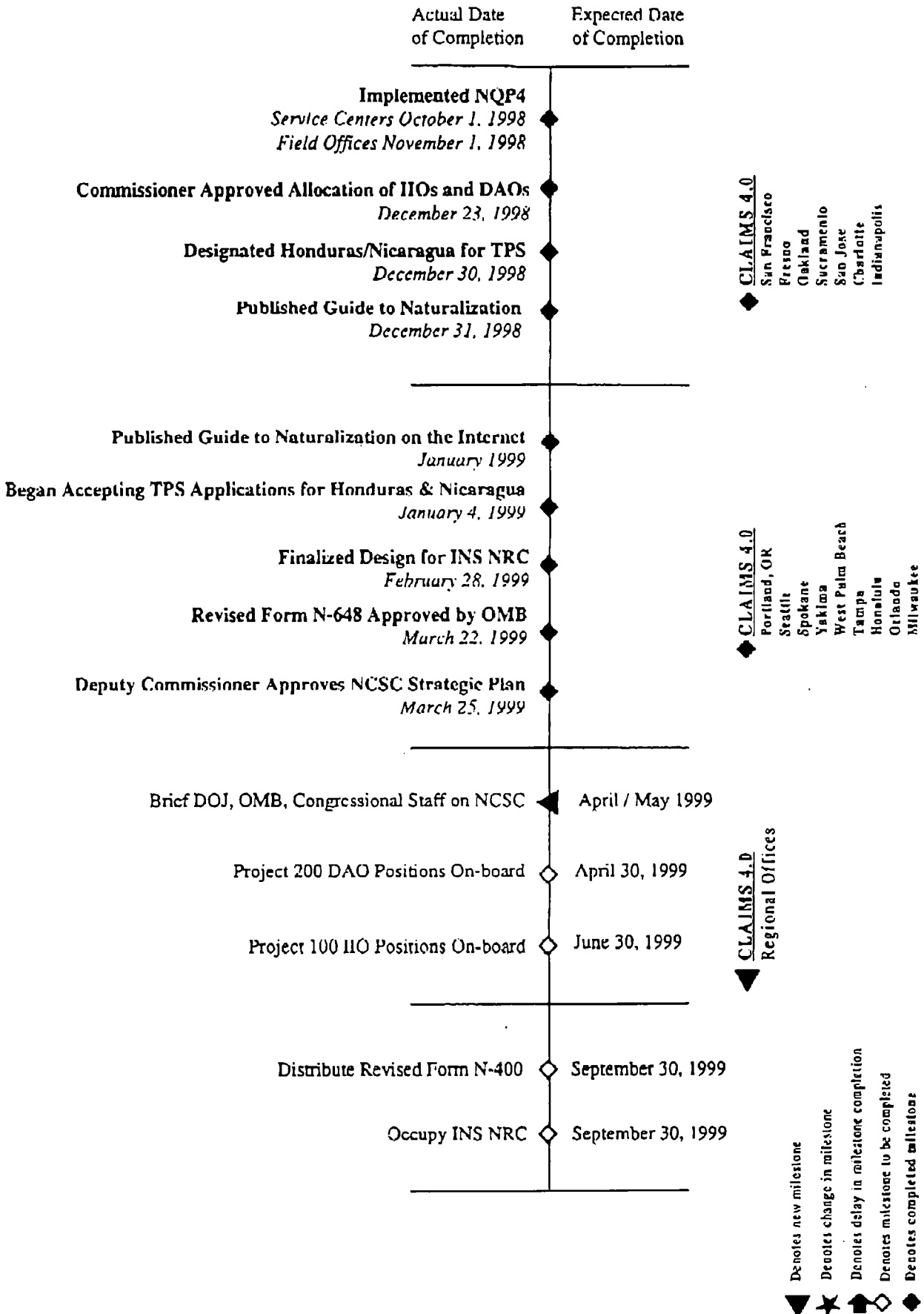
IMMIGRATION SERVICES MILESTONES

1st Quarter FY 1999

2nd Quarter FY 1999

3rd Quarter FY 1999

4th Quarter FY 1999



Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: March 1999

**Part IV. Planned Immigration Services Improvements for FY 1999****Preparation and Service**

*Project Objective: To ensure that accessible and accurate information and services are provided to the customer.*

**Development Plan***Milestones:***Revised Form N-400, Application for Naturalization**

- Distribute Revised Form N-400 by September 30, 1999.

**Records Centralization**

- Complete relocation of all retired A-Files from the Washington, DC, Federal Records Center (FRC) located in Suitland, Maryland, to the FRC at Lee's Summit, Missouri (April 30, 1999).
- Additional files will be relocated to the FRC at Lee's Summit throughout FY 1999.
- Begin NRC construction (April 30, 1999).
- Complete development and deploy the National File Tracking System at NRC; install automated data processing (ADP) and telecommunications systems; install shelving for first 10,000,000 files; complete recruitment for core INS and contractor staff for NRC (September 30, 1999).
- Occupy the NRC (September 30, 1999).

**National Customer Service Center (NCSC)**

- Brief representatives of the DOJ, OMB, and Congressional staff on the strategic plan outlining milestones for the NCSC (April/May 1999).
- Contingent upon approval by DOJ, OMB, and Congressional staff, projected milestones and timelines will include:
  - Lease location for Temporary Site 2 (May 31, 1999).
  - Begin hiring and training staff for Site 1 (Woodlawn, Maryland) and Site 2 (location to be determined) (May 31, 1999).
  - Implement change of address for N-400s at Woodlawn Telephone Center (July 31, 1999).
  - Expand NCSC's toll free services to cities currently serviced by Western Telephone Center (July 31, 1999).
  - Expand NCSC's toll free services to Eastern states (September 30, 1999).
  - Complete hiring and training staff for Site 1 (September 30, 1999).

**Citizenship Testing**

*Project Objective: To design and implement a standardized citizenship testing program.*

**Development Plan***Milestones:***Citizenship Test Content**

- Milestones are under development by the policy working group established for this project.

**Naturalization Testing Pilot at Application Support Centers (ASCs)**

- Milestones are under development pending review of the testing pilot at ASCs report delivered on March 31, 1999.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: March 1999

Adjudication

*Project Objectives: To standardize the interview and ceremony process, and to reduce the number of case continuations.*

**Development Plan***Milestones:*Complete (Pre-Adjudication) File Review

- Implement preliminary phase of file review using a stand alone Access database in the California and Texas Service Centers (May 31, 1999) and in the Vermont and Nebraska Service Centers (June 30, 1999).
- Finalize functional requirements for CLAIMS 4 module for file review process (May 31, 1999).
- The INS expects to have all 100 IIO positions filled by June 30, 1999.

Disability Exceptions Processing

- Issue a memorandum offering comprehensive guidance on disability waivers to field offices (April 7, 1999; delayed from earlier date of March 31, 1999).
- Begin training on updated field guidance for six largest offices (May 31, 1999).

Adjudicators Field Manual (Adjudications Handbook)

- Sections of the Adjudicators Field Manual covering parts of naturalizations and customer service will be published by September 30, 1999. The complete manual will be distributed on CD-ROM, and include process and policy overviews; hyperlinks to laws, regulations, and policies; sections on customer service and career information; and training materials for CLAIMS.

Information Technology

*Project Objective: Provide INS employees with needed automation and standardized systems to process applications.*

**Development Plan***Milestones:*CLAIMS 4

- Deploy a CLAIMS 4 workstation in each of the three Regional Offices (April 30, 1999).
- Conduct follow up training at three California sites: Sacramento, San Jose, and Fresno (April 30, 1999).
- The INS has reduced the deployment schedule for CLAIMS 4 to a maximum of six districts during the remainder of FY 1999 in order to minimize the initial impact that deploying a new system has on production of N-400 cases. In lieu of new deployment, the CLAIMS 4 team will focus on improving system capabilities and providing greater support to offices already using the system. New deployment of CLAIMS 4 is scheduled for additional sites, including Los Angeles, during FY 2000.

Immigration and Naturalization Benefits Processing Status Report

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Data: March 1999

Citizenship Audits and Reviews

*Project Objective: To ensure the integrity of the naturalization process.*

**Development Plan***Milestones:*Ongoing Naturalization Reviews

- KPMG audits of the INS' compliance with the National Quality Procedures (NQP4) are expected in April/May/June 1999.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Nicaraguans and Hondurans

*Project Objective: Make Temporary Protected Status available to nationals of Nicaragua and Honduras as a result of the conditions in those countries after the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch.*

**Development Plan**

- Begin issuing Employment Authorization Documents (April 15, 1999).



H 2A Mike Swartz

Pauly - Deputy level mtg <sup>to decide</sup> - Scott ~~me~~ met ① memo  
Jim Steinkamp ② meeting

- Public Chg - get decided.

# Backgrounder

05/24/99

## Naturalization Program — FY 1999 Mid-Year Update

The Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) top service priority is reducing the naturalization application backlog. Over the past six months, INS has worked diligently to redesign the naturalization process and increase the number of naturalization applications completed while maintaining the highest standards of process integrity. As a result, the agency completed 461,543 naturalization applications during the first six months of FY 1999 (October 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999) — a 91 percent increase over the same time last year (241,766).

While this progress is significant, INS fell short of its application completion target of 530,000 by approximately 68,500 cases during this period. INS has identified numerous system performance and production management issues that have negatively impacted production during FY 1999. Many of these problems have been addressed; however, despite diligent efforts, additional problems persist.

With an aggressive plan in place to solve production problems -- and with the support and oversight of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice -- INS remains committed to completing 1.2 million naturalization applications this fiscal year. The agency goal is, by September 30, 1999, to reduce the national average projected processing time to complete a naturalization application from the current 27 months to 12 months. INS will further reduce the national average projected processing time to approximately 6 months by September 30, 2000. These completion goals are based on a projected level of 700,000 new applications filed per year for FY 1999 and FY 2000.

### Production Initiatives

INS has determined that the single largest obstacle to achieving its production goals for FY 1999 is the inability to move interview-ready work from INS service centers, where data entry and initial processing occur, to district offices where applicants are interviewed and cases are completed.

To solve this problem and increase production during the second half of FY 1999, the agency is:

- Allowing field offices the flexibility to adjudicate cases using a variety of computer systems and even move work manually, if necessary, to ensure that all casework is progressing towards completion;
- Improving the management of workflow by identifying and eliminating processing bottlenecks;

(more)

## Naturalization Program — FY 1999 Mid-Year Update

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- Improving the performance of new automated systems and their interfaces with other systems so that more cases can be completed faster while ensuring the integrity of the process;
- Allocating an additional \$4 million in funding to field offices and service centers for contract support, overtime, and other naturalization needs;
- Hiring new staff that was authorized in the FY 1999 budget — 200 new adjudicator positions to the eight districts with the highest backlogs, and 100 Immigration Information Officers to the four service centers; and
- Converting 300 of INS' 600 term (non-permanent) adjudicator positions to permanent staff to reduce attrition and help maintain an experienced and productive workforce.
- Appointing a permanent senior executive responsible for the direction of the Immigration Services Division. The agency has appointed William R. Yates — one of its highest-ranking officials with an INS service background— to serve as Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner for Field Operations, Immigration Services Division.

### Naturalization Redesign and Customer Service

INS' goal and the long-term success of the naturalization initiative is dependent on establishing a streamlined application process that integrates automation and provides accurate and timely information to customers in a user-friendly manner. Over the past six months, a series of process and procedural changes have been established or are being implemented to support this goal.

- **National Customer Service Center.** INS will expand its contract telephone support and information center operations and is creating a 1-800-telephone number to assist applicants in notifying the INS of address changes.
- **Records Centralization and Cleanup.** INS will consolidate immigrant records in a centralized location to ensure the accuracy of information maintained in case files (A-files) and reduce application-processing delays caused by lost or missing files.
- **Centralized File and Medical Waiver Reviews.** INS service centers will conduct file reviews to ensure that a naturalization application is complete and ready for adjudication and interview, thus reducing unnecessary application-processing delays. INS also will centralize the review of disability exceptions (medical waivers for naturalization testing requirements) at the service centers to improve the consistency of decision-making and speed application processing in district offices.

(more)

**Naturalization Program — FY 1999 Mid-Year Update**Page 3

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- **New Disability Waiver Guidance.** In an effort to promote fairness and consistency in the adjudication of naturalization cases of applicants with disabilities, the INS has provided its field offices with comprehensive policy guidance that clarifies some of the more complex issues related to the review of Forms N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exception.
- **Electronic Citizenship Applications.** To promote faster, more efficient forms processing, INS has developed an electronic version of the Form N-400 that, as of May 1, 1999, applicants may complete on a personal computer via the INS web site. The electronic version captures key applicant data on a bar code that is printed on the application. Applicants complete the form, print it, sign it, and mail it to the appropriate INS service center. The bar code can be scanned to automatically record the data, ensuring better data entry speed and accuracy.
- **INS Web Site.** The INS has established a customer-friendly web site with a focus on naturalization information that includes eligibility requirements, forms, a self-test for the history/civics test, Selective Service requirements, the entire Guide to Naturalization, and updates on new naturalization initiatives. Over the next several months, the agency will be expanding its web site to include additional information that is of interest to customers on INS activities, programs, procedures, and services. A major enhancement has been posting homepages for INS five largest district offices (New York City, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco) and San Jose, site of the INS customer service pilot. Homepages for all other district offices will follow during the remainder the fiscal year.
- **Feedback on Naturalization Guide.** Between January and early March, the INS received approximately 1,700 responses from survey cards that were distributed with the new Guide to Naturalization to assess its usefulness. Approximately 97 percent of the respondents characterized the Guide as either "very helpful" or "helpful." A number of those surveyed praised the Guide as a sign of the agency's commitment to improve customer service and reduce the backlog of naturalization applications.

— INS —

## Naturalization Program — Mid-Year FY 1999 Update Talking Points — 5/24/99

- The Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) top service priority is reducing the naturalization application backlog while maintaining the highest standards of process integrity.
- As a result, the agency completed 461,543 naturalization applications during the first six months of FY 1999 (October 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999) — a 91 percent increase over the same time last year (241,766).
- While this progress is significant, INS fell short of its application completion target of 530,000 by approximately 68,500 cases during this period.
- With an aggressive plan in place to solve production problems INS remains committed to its goal of completing 1.2 million naturalization applications in FY1999.
- The agency goal is, by September 30, 1999, to reduce the national average projected processing time to complete a naturalization application from the current 27 months to 12 months. INS will further reduce the national average projected processing time to approximately 6 months by September 30, 2000. These completion goals are based on a projected level of 700,000 new applications filed per year for FY 1999 and FY 2000.

### Production Initiatives

- INS has determined that the single largest obstacle to achieving its production goals for FY 1999 is the inability to move interview-ready work from INS service centers to district offices. To solve this problem the agency is:
  - Allowing field offices the flexibility to adjudicate cases using a variety of computer systems and even move work manually, if necessary, to ensure that all casework is progressing towards completion;
  - Improving the management of workflow by identifying and eliminating processing bottlenecks;
  - Improving the performance of new automated systems and their interfaces with other systems so that more cases can be completed faster while ensuring the integrity of the process;
  - Allocating an additional \$4 million in funding to field offices and service centers for contract support, overtime, and other naturalization needs;
  - Hiring new staff that was authorized in the FY 1999 budget — 200 new adjudicator positions to the eight districts with the highest backlogs, and 100 Immigration Information Officers to the four service centers; and

(more)

- Converting 300 of INS' 600 term (non-permanent) adjudicator positions to permanent staff to reduce attrition and help maintain an experienced and productive workforce.
- Appointing William R. Yates — one of its highest-ranking officials with an INS service background— to serve permanently as Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner for Field Operations, Immigration Services Division.

## **Naturalization Redesign and Customer Service**

- INS plans to establish a streamlined application process and improve customer service. To support this goal, the INS is:
  - **National Customer Service Center.** INS will expand its contract telephone support and information center operations and is creating a 1-800-telephone number to assist applicants in notifying the INS of address changes.
  - **Records Centralization and Cleanup.** INS will consolidate immigrant records in a centralized location.
  - **Centralized File and Medical Waiver Reviews.** INS service centers will conduct file reviews to ensure that a naturalization application is complete and ready for adjudication and interview. INS also will centralize the review of disability exceptions (medical waivers for naturalization testing requirements) at the service centers.
  - **New Disability Waiver Guidance.** INS has provided its field offices with comprehensive policy guidance that clarifies some of the more complex issues related to the review of Forms N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exception.
  - **Electronic Citizenship Applications.** INS has developed an electronic version of the Form N-400 that, as of May 1, 1999, applicants may complete on a personal computer via the INS web site, ensuring better data entry speed and accuracy.
  - **INS Web Site.** The INS has established a customer-friendly web site with a focus on naturalization information. Also, homepages have been established for INS five largest district offices and San Jose.
  - **Feedback on Naturalization Guide.** 1,700 responses from survey cards indicated that 97 percent of the respondents characterized the Guide as either "very helpful" or "helpful."

— INS —

For Internal Use Only

**Naturalization Update — Questions & Answers**  
5/24/99

Question 1

**Q: Why is there still a backlog of 1.9 million naturalization applications when you have been given additional staff and resources to resolve naturalization delays?**

**A:** The additional resources we received in the FY 1999 Appropriations are not expected to contribute to backlog reduction until June 1999. All new adjudications officers must go through a comprehensive background check before entering on duty and must complete more than five weeks of training before they can be assigned adjudicative duties. Although we have not seen dramatic reductions in our pending caseload, our completions have increased dramatically (91% over 1st half FY 1998).

In addition, on January 15, 1999, the INS implemented a fee increase for naturalization applications, from \$95-\$225, to enable the agency to recoup actual application processing costs. The rush to file for naturalization under the old fee resulted in a tremendous increase in application receipts during the month — INS received 253,402 new naturalization applications in January. While this sudden influx of applications far exceeded agency expectations, the INS anticipates that receipts will decrease significantly in the next few months.

Question 2

**Q: Why do you have a backlog when your District Offices are running out of work? Is this an example of poor management?**

**A:** During some specific periods of time, some small offices did not receive sufficient N-400 workload to continue interviewing at expected levels. However, district offices will not run out of work. Adjudicators are scheduled to interview various cases throughout their day, including but not limited to naturalization (N-400), adjustment of status (I-485) and orphan adoption (N-600) cases. District offices are supplied with new naturalization cases for adjudication from their respective Service Centers as the cases meet quality assurance requirements and have required FBI clearances. In order to reduce the backlog, a great percentage of the effort has been focused on the N-400, however, no resources will fall idle in the event the N-400 caseload, for a particular office, is still awaiting clearance.

In addition, INS is:

- Allowing field offices the flexibility to adjudicate cases using a variety of computer systems and even move work manually, if necessary, to ensure that all casework is progressing towards completion;
- Improving the management of workflow by identifying and eliminating processing bottlenecks;
- Improving the performance of new automated systems and their interfaces with other systems so that more cases can be completed faster while ensuring the integrity of the process;

### Question 3

**Q: Considering the issues of the District Offices running out of work and isn't it true that your new automated tracking system, CLAIMS 4, has failed?**

A: The problems you have mentioned have been the result of errors in systems interfaces, not within the CLAIMS 4 system itself. CLAIMS 4 incorporates data integrity, improved case tracking, management controls, and reporting, and on these elements has been successful.

INS continues to work on difficulties arising from interfaces between its multiple database systems, and particularly the linkages between older systems and newer ones.

### Question 4

**Q: INS' goal was to complete 1.5 million applications in FY 1999 and reduce processing times to 12 months. Can you still meet this goal? If not, why not? What is your new goal?**

A: INS originally projected that we needed to complete 1.5 million cases during FY 1999 in order to ensure that we would meet the Servicewide average projected processing time goal of 10-12 months at the end of FY 1999. This level of completions would give us a protective "cushion" against an unexpected increase in receipts and ensure we still met our processing time goal.

We have eliminated our protective cushion against an increase in receipts. If the annual receipt level stays steady at 700,000 applications, we will still make our 12-month Servicewide average processing time goal. If receipts exceed 700,000, we may exceed the 12 months.

## Question 5

**Q: Why should the public be confident that you would meet your new goal?**

A: We have demonstrated substantial improvement in our productivity during the first quarter. We completed 91% more cases during the 1st half of FY 1999 than in the 1st half of last year. We processed 62% more applicants for fingerprints in November that we did in August. We increased the number of applicants fingerprinted again by 20% between January and March. In addition, naturalization interviews increased 32% between August and November and 45% between November and March.

We have experienced shortfalls to date, but with systems fixes working properly, we are well positioned for production.

## Question 6

**Q: It's been a year since INS made naturalization a priority. The New York, Los Angeles, and Miami districts continue to account for more than 50% of the backlog, and yet they have the lowest productivity rates per adjudicator. Is this an indication of poor management? Why aren't heads rolling?**

A: These offices account for the highest volume of receipts. They have also been the most heavily impacted by systems issues and high turnover in staff. The INS has worked closely with local management to increase production and manage workload. We have seen these efforts begin to pay off in Los Angeles and are using the lessons learned there in Miami and New York City. Although we have not yet reached the level we want to achieve, we continue to make progress.

## Question 7

**Q: What's happening to the processing of non-naturalization applications?**

A: Many of the improvements we have initiated for naturalization, such as changes in the fingerprinting program, will benefit the processing of other than naturalization applications as well. INS also continues to devote resources to processing other than naturalization applications, such as adjustment of status.

## Question 8

**Q: What will happen to naturalization and other immigration benefit application processing INS will have to take on the processing of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Central Americans?**

A: Applications are being accepted through the applicants' respective Service Center, so there will be minimal disruption to the naturalization interview process being conducted in the District offices. Additional fingerprinting needs will not pose a significant strain on the existing Application Support Centers. INS has also set up a hot line specifically for TPS, 888-557-5398.

Question 9

**Q: Did INS see a surge of naturalization applications as a result of the January 15, 1999, fee increase?**

A: Yes, we saw an increase in filings in advance of the fee increase. This increase partially masked the productivity gains we achieved during the first quarter of FY 1999. Receipt levels are evening out and INS has made steady progress on backlog reduction as the number of pending cases decreased during both February and March. Further progress will become evident during the 3rd quarter of FY 1999.

Question 10

**Q: What do you expect the naturalization backlog to be by the end of FY 1999?**

A: Receipts for this year are expected to reach 700,000. INS expects pending to be approximately 1.3 million and Servicewide average projected processing time to be approximately 12 months at the end of FY 1999.

Question 11

**Q: How do we know productivity will continue upward during the rest of the year?**

A: INS has instituted numerous steps to reduce the backlog while continuing to improve overall performance. For example:

- Use all application processing systems to move work from the four service centers, where initial data entry and processing occurs, to field offices where applicants are interviewed and cases are completed. If necessary, INS will move work manually from service centers to district offices to ensure that all casework is progressing towards completion.
- Increase the speed and efficiency of the new application processing system, CLAIMS 4, so that more cases can be processed faster while ensuring the integrity of the process.

- Scaling back deployment of new automated systems for the remainder of the fiscal year and using the savings for overtime, contract support or other needs related to completing naturalization cases.
- Deploying new staff that was authorized in the FY 1999 budget — 200 new adjudicator positions to the eight districts with the highest backlogs and 100 Immigration Information Officers to the four Service Centers.
- Converting 300 of INS' 600 term (non-permanent) adjudicator positions (the 400 authorized in FY 1998 and the 200 authorized in FY 1999) — to permanent staff with the expected result of decreasing attrition and maintaining an experienced and productive workforce.
- Building on the success of production management approaches established in Los Angeles which have increased mid-year productivity in the district by 205% from the same time last year. The strategy focused on:
  - appointing a fully empowered backlog reduction site manager,
  - revising application processing procedures to eliminate redundancies,
  - implementing a team-based approach to management to strengthen accountability, and
  - ensuring that managers are held accountable for production levels.
- Conducting site visits to other key cities and proceeding to implement similar production management initiatives in the other offices, as appropriate — recognizing that each INS district has its own unique challenges regarding backlog reduction.

#### Question 12

**Q:** If the new adjudicator positions won't realistically come on board until the third of fourth quarter, won't that have a negative effect on productivity — and consequently on waiting times?

**A:** Our backlog reduction plans take into account the added production of these new resources for the last four months of the fiscal year.

## Question 13

**Q: In delaying the deployment of CLAIMS 4 due to budgetary concerns, doesn't that renege on a commitment the commissioner made last year as one of the benchmarks that had to be met before fees were raised?**

**A: INS will deploy CLAIMS 4 to a maximum of 6 additional districts during this year. This decision was made to minimize the impact of deploying a new system on production of naturalization cases. In lieu of new deployment, the CLAIMS 4 team will focus on improving system performance and providing greater support to offices already using the system. Funding, originally earmarked for deployment, will be used to supplement naturalization resources in the local offices and service centers.**

## Question 14

**Q: When will you name a permanent head of the Immigration Services Division?**

**A: William R. Yates has been named as the Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner, Immigration Services Division, on a permanent basis. Mr. Yates has been acting in this capacity since August 1998.**

## Question 15

**Q: What happens to your processing time if the number of applications filed increases above your projections?**

**A: If receipts increase by only a minor amount, we will still meet our Servicewide average projected processing time of 12 months. If receipts increase substantially beyond the 700,000 projected, INS will not be able to meet the Servicewide average projected processing time of 12 months.**

— INS —

**Steven M. Mertens**

06/25/99 05:26:31 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Michael J. Ahola/OND/CP/EOP@EOP, Kenneth L. Schwartz/OMB/EOP@EOP, David J. Haun/OMB/EOP@EOP, Irene Bueno/OPD/EOP@EOP

cc: Douglas Pitkin/OMB/EOP@EOP, Sherron Duncan/OMB/EOP@EOP

Subject: GOOD NEWS ON NATZ !

The AG wanted Colgate to call Michael to report that the preliminary INS naturalization completion numbers for May are ~~112K~~ -- or 7K above the May goal of 105K.

Colgate reported that <sup>115K</sup>INS is saying as a "worse case" scenario they will be able to complete 1.150M applications by the end of the fiscal year. Justice feels Deich's trip to California was the turning point for the program.

MD need not call Colgate back.

*Final end of month*