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IMMIGRATION MANAGEMENT: Strong
Leadership and Management Reforms
Needed to Address Serious Problems

Statement of
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Before the
Subcommittee on International Law,
Immigration, and Refugees
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives



IMMIGRATION MANAGEMENT: STRONG LEADERSHIP AND
MANAGEMENT REFORMS NEEDED TO ADDRESS
SERIOUS PROBLEMS

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY
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U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

The INS Commissioner faces difficult challenges carrying out a myriad of programs that not only attempt to prevent illegal entry into the United States, but also to provide service to individuals seeking immigration benefits.

GAO found that over the past decade weak management systems and inconsistent leadership have allowed serious problems to go unresolved. Without coherent overall direction and basic management reforms, the organization has been unable to effectively address certain enforcement responsibilities and longstanding service delivery problems.

In its January report, GAO noted that INS needed to take a number of immediate actions to improve program operations both in enforcement and service. GAO said, in the long term, Justice and INS must articulate a vision of how INS is to operate to effectively carry out its role of implementing the Nation's immigration policy.

The Department of Justice and INS have recently initiated some actions that begin to address the problems GAO identified. The appointment of a group headed by Norman Carlson, the initiation of some actions to address cash and debt management, and the hiring of a total quality management firm to assist in establishing a framework to develop a strategic vision for INS are positive steps. But much remains to be done before INS will have fixed its fundamental management problems.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss management issues concerning the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The basis for my remarks are three management GAO reports released over the past six months--two reports issued last January addressed the critical financial and overall management reforms needed at this important agency and one report issued in September concerned the immediate need for information management improvements¹.

INS currently is facing many challenges as it carries out its vital mission in a time of unprecedented growth and change. Balancing both INS' enforcement and service roles would be difficult under any circumstances, but INS' task is compounded by a lack of consensus regarding immigration policy, the unpredictable nature of changing world conditions, the persistent negative perceptions, both internally and externally, of INS' abilities, and the difficulty of coordinating the complex number of agencies and outside interest groups who are affected by INS. To help with these enormous challenges, since 1975 Congress has more than tripled INS' budget and more than doubled the number of

¹Immigration Management: Strong Leadership and Management Reforms Needed to Address Serious Problems, (GAO/GGD-91-28, Jan. 1991); Financial Management: INS Lacks Accountability and Controls Over Its Resources, (GAO/AFMD-91-20, Jan. 1991); and Information Management: Immigration and Naturalization Service Lacks Ready Access to Essential Data, (GAO/IMTEC-90-75, Sep. 1990).

employees. However, over this period the absence of effective leadership within this environment has resulted in the organization developing into a group of autonomous, segmented programs.

Rather than recount the problems that we and others have identified at INS, let me focus on (1) what short and long-term actions we believe are necessary for INS to become a better instrument of the federal government in carrying out immigration policy, and (2) what actions Justice and INS have initiated to address our recommendations.

A key action taken by the Department of Justice was the appointment of a group in November 1990, headed by former Bureau of Prisons Director, Norman Carlson. This group outlined actions needed to confront INS' longstanding management problems and reported to the Attorney General in February 1991. While the Carlson group recommendations have not been publicly released, we understand that they closely track our recommendations.

INS has also taken some steps to address our recommendations including the initiation of actions to address cash and debt management and the hiring of a total quality management firm to assist in establishing a framework to develop a strategic vision. But, much remains to be done before INS will have fixed its fundamental management problems.

Let me briefly discuss the recommendations contained in our management reports. The recommendations called for: improving financial management, better resource planning for enforcement and service programs, information management, and strategic direction.

Financial Management

The area requiring the most immediate attention is the critical need for financial and budgeting reforms. Because of poor financial information, INS could not determine how much its units spend. INS management of inspection and examination fee accounts were especially troublesome. Without control over spending, INS frequently adjusted budgets thereby constraining managers' ability to carry out their programs. In this state of flux, managers did not have good information on resource availability and priorities. We recommended that the Attorney General, in consultation with the Director of OMB, establish a group of top experts from other federal agencies and the private sector to work with the Commissioner to design and implement an effective financial management system by the end of fiscal year 1991.

INS has taken some actions to address specific financial management weaknesses. These include (1) issuing directives to help ensure proper collection and deposit of fee revenue and (2)

establishing a task force to focus on how to improve debt management. But, the fundamental financial management problems remain unaddressed. For example, INS and Justice officials continue to disagree over when INS' accounting function can be converted to Justice's Financial Management Information System (FMIS). The enhancement of FMIS' general ledger module, which was to be complete by January 1991, is still not operational. And neither Justice nor INS have taken steps to establish a financial management group to assist in designing an effective financial management system, as we recommended.

Resource and Workforce Planning

Another area requiring attention is better workforce and resource planning. Actions are needed to articulate INS component responsibilities and to provide a clear sense of purpose and coordination among the different components. For example, we recommended that the Commissioner develop an enforcement strategy that clearly delineates the responsibilities of the Border Patrol and Investigations Division to improve coordination and eliminate unnecessary program overlap and also address problems at INS detention facilities by increasing the number of detention officers and augmenting physical security.

INS has recently submitted a draft study of Border Patrol and Investigations Division activities to the Department. This study recommends the phasing out of interior Border Patrol stations and

shifting resources to border locations. This is a positive step. However, we would encourage the Department of Justice and INS to continue to study the delineation of the responsibilities of the Border Patrol and Investigations Division, particularly as it relates to anti-smuggling investigations. In the detention area some progress has been made. Staffing at the Florence, Arizona detention facility has increased and both security and staffing at the El Centro, California facility have improved. However, staffing shortages at the new San Pedro, California facility have resulted in INS using the medium security facility to house excludable² aliens rather than criminal aliens as intended.

INS also needs to improve human resource allocation in the adjudication and inspection programs. We noted that even though INS experienced a large increase in funds from user fees for adjudications and inspections, INS continues to experience service delivery problems. We recommended that the Commissioner improve the allocation of adjudication and inspection resources to improve service and, among other goals, reduce the high inspection overtime usage. Such actions are critical to be able to ensure that new sources of revenue from fee accounts are used effectively, and to improve service to customers who are now directly paying for them.

²Aliens denied admission into the United States by INS.

Adjudication application processing times still exceed INS standards. New information on the adjudications programs in five large districts, indicates that processing times between fiscal years 1989 and 1990 improved in New York, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles, but got worse in San Francisco. However, nationwide processing times again increased during the first quarter of fiscal year 1991. This trend comes at a time when INS has been increasing the fees charged for application processing. Earlier this month INS again increased application processing fees. Over the past three years, applications processing fees have more than tripled.

Passenger processing delays also continue in the inspections program. Last month in a separate report, we noted that processing times at 13 major international airports averaged one to three hours during peak travel periods, and some processing times exceed four hours.³ And, updated information on air and sea inspector overtime shows continuing increases. Nearly 712,000 hours of overtime were charged in fiscal year 1990, up from 680,000 charged in 1989.

Information Management

Another area requiring attention is information management. In our September 1990 report, we said that INS lacked the strong

³International Trade: Easing Foreign Visitors' Arrivals at U.S. Ports, (GAO/NSIAD-91-6, March 1991).

leadership necessary for effective and efficient information resource management. Past actions in this area tended to be shortsighted and piecemeal. As a result, we recommended that the Commissioner take a leadership role and address INS' significant information resource management problems. INS has begun to develop an information plan that outlines what information is needed and how it is to be collected and processed. INS officials told us the first phase of this information architecture is to be completed by June 1991.

Strategic Direction

In our general management report we also said that INS needs to take long-term actions to address strategic management weaknesses, including reconfiguring the organizational structure to strengthen accountability. Soon after his arrival, the Commissioner took steps to restructure the agency. His proposal was recently approved by the Department of Justice and OMB and has been forwarded to Congress for review. Even though the Commissioner's reorganization plan has not been officially approved, several new executive positions have been created and reporting lines of some field units have been revised. We have not seen the specifics of the current reorganization proposal.

Another long-term action needed is the development and articulation by the Attorney General and the Commissioner of a clear vision of how INS is to operate to effectively carry out

its role of implementing the Nation's immigration policy. This vision should include determining what the priorities should be and establishing a multi-year financial, resource allocation, and accountability strategy to achieve them. Also needed is a multi-year staff development program to assure that appropriate people are properly trained and developed to carry out the mission. We understand that actions have been initiated by the Commissioner to begin to address these concerns. A contract has been signed with the Planning Research Corporation to begin to develop a Total Quality Management (TQM) framework to aid in developing an INS vision and agency-wide priorities.

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This concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have at this time.