



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

USCIS TODAY

SEPTEMBER 2006



A MESSAGE FROM USCIS DIRECTOR EMILIO T. GONZÁLEZ



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Since our establishment in 2003, USCIS has made dramatic progress in backlog elimination and customer service efforts while simultaneously increasing its role in supporting homeland security initiatives and reorganizing key business elements to achieve operational efficiency. Our three strategic imperatives of enhancing national security, improving customer service and maintaining operational excellence guide our ongoing efforts to eliminate the backlog.

Today, more than 70% of all previously backlogged cases have been completed since the height of 3.85 million cases in January 2004. At the end of July, the overall backlog stood at 1.1 million. Of this amount, nearly 1 million are backlogged for reasons outside of USCIS control such as unavailable visa numbers or customer induced delays. The remaining 140,000 cases pending are within USCIS control. When taking this into account, the remaining 140,000 cases represent 95% total completion for cases within USCIS control. This achievement is a testament to the thousands of USCIS employees who have come in early, stayed late and worked weekends to complete their production goals.

What's more important, however, is what USCIS employees have not done. They have not cut corners or used shortcuts. They have not lost their focus on national security. They have not compromised security or integrity in the name of production. Since 2003, USCIS has mandated that every applicant undergo a national security and background check. We have also expanded the range of applicants required to submit fingerprints and other biometrics at USCIS Application Support Centers. Each day, USCIS employees complete security and background checks on more than 135,000 applicants. These critical measures have reduced fraud and abuse and detected individuals who pose a threat to our communities.

We have also implemented time and cost saving initiatives that allow for more adjudicators to have immediate access to application information. These and other positive results can be credited to the appropriation of \$560 million over five years from Congress to hire term employees dedicated solely to backlog case processing. To complement the infusion of term staff, we have streamlined existing processes and procedures, centralized processing of certain applications at specialized offices and leveraged existing information technology systems to assist the adjudicative process.

By reducing redundant procedures, consolidating form types and gathering all pertinent information at the beginning of the application process, we have increased the efficiency of our operations and left less margin for human error. I write to tell you that USCIS will continue to meet its backlog reduction goals for the remaining month of FY 2006 with the same determination, commitment, and integrity it has shown since first taking on this challenge five years ago. But I will not compromise national security for the sake of meeting a deadline.

The fact is, USCIS is better prepared than at any time in our history to build upon our accomplishments, move forward and create a modern immigration system for the 21st century. Tackling the backlog has proven our ability to perform under pressure and excel under a mandate. Today we are a more flexible, sturdy business organization capable of taking advantage of our trained and experienced staff. I have every confidence in our employees and capable leadership that, should Congress or the President call on our agency to lead again in the future, we will answer with the same level of success we have seen in this incredible achievement.

USCIS: AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION SERVICE

BACKLOG ELIMINATION UPDATE

On February 2, 2004, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that the agency was prioritizing efforts to reduce its backlog for immigration benefit applications to realize the President's goal of achieving six-month processing times for all immigration benefit applications by the end of FY 2006. These early initiatives formed the foundation of the USCIS Backlog Elimination Plan, a two year program aimed at improving the efficiency and enhancing the security of immigration services.

Though a combination of good old-fashioned hard work and the use of innovative system technology enhancements, USCIS has now completely eliminated the previous backlogs associated with the employment-based Form I-140 immigrant petitions and Form I-129 nonimmigrant petitions. In addition, USCIS has significantly reduced the processing times for rendering decisions on these employment-based petitions. The most recent available figures from July 2006 are reflected on the chart to the right.

Despite added security measures that take extra time to process, overall waiting times for almost every form type has decreased from previous national averages since 2004. As we move toward the end of FY 2006, every completed background check and application brings us one step closer to realizing a six-month application processing time for all form types and a more secure, efficient national immigration system.

The USCIS Backlog Elimination Plan is more than just numbers, target dates and projections. Our efforts affect people's lives and our work takes on significance beyond other benefits our government provides. Achieving our backlog elimination goals will enable every applicant to obtain benefits more rapidly. Simply put, eliminating the backlog will facilitate the reunification of separated families and enable employers to create new jobs and opportunities for willing, lawful workers, and thus improve the lives and well being of millions of aspiring Americans.



February 2004 Processing Times

Form I-140	-	11 months
Form I-129	-	2 months

February 2004 Backlogs

Form I-140	-	37,746
Form I-129	-	17,387

July 2006 Processing Times

Form I-140	-	3 months
Form I-129	-	< 3 months

July 2006 Backlogs

Form I-140	-	0
Form I-129	-	0

USCIS TO CELEBRATE CITIZENSHIP DAY, CONSTITUTION WEEK, SEPTEMBER 17-23

USCIS is planning a number of naturalization ceremonies for Citizenship Day (September 17th) and Constitution Week (September 17th-23rd). During this week, USCIS will begin a new partnership with the National Park Service to host naturalization ceremonies at national parks across the country. A naturalization ceremony at Ellis Island on September 18th with Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Emilio Gonzalez, Director of USCIS will be the venue for announcing this partnership. Below is a list outlining other special naturalization ceremonies taking place:

- 9/17/06 - **Hyde Park, New York** - Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site
- 9/18/06 - **St. Louis, Missouri** - Jefferson National Expansion Memorial
- 9/18/06 - **Charleston, South Carolina** - Charles Pinckney National Historic Site
- 9/18/06 - **Thibodaux, Louisiana** - Jean Lafitte Historical Park and Preserve
- 9/18/06 - **Kansas City, Missouri** - Liberty Memorial WWI Museum
- 9/18/06 - **Kansas City, Missouri** - Dole Institute
- 9/18/06 - **Phoenix, Arizona** - Orpheum Theater
- 9/20/06 - **San Diego, California** - Cabrillo National Park
- 9/20/06 - **Houston, Texas** - M.O. Campbell Education Center
- 9/20/06 - **Grand Rapids, MI** - Gerald Ford Presidential Museum
- 9/22/06 - **Sierra Nevada, California** - Yosemite National Park



USCIS: PROMOTING OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

USCIS: PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES



HELPS EXPOSE MARRIAGE FRAUD IN UTAH

A federal grand jury indictment charging 24 individuals with numerous violations of federal law in connection with a sophisticated marriage fraud scheme was unsealed on August 7, 2006, in Salt Lake City's federal court. The charges stem from a scheme designed to allow Vietnamese nationals to use phony marriages in order to enter or remain in the United States. The 79-count indictment culminated an 18-month, multi-agency investigation.

The investigation began when the office of Utah Senator Orrin Hatch received a citizen tip and referred the lead to USCIS. As the investigation developed, USCIS personnel, working closely with Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, reviewed more than 1,000 documents related to the fraudulent marriages and performed marriage fraud investigations for all related cases. In addition to identifying individuals of interest, USCIS' Office of Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) retrieved relevant documents and established a database to maintain these cases for future use as evidence. The charges in the indictment include conspiracy to defraud the United States; alien smuggling; marriage fraud; and aggravated identity theft.

ASSISTS IN ARREST OF MIAMI FUGITIVE

A registered sex offender was arrested after USCIS officers discovered he had violated the terms of his parole. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement arrested William Smith, of Lumber City, GA, in the USCIS Miami District office after Smith appeared with his wife for an immigration benefit interview.

Routine background checks conducted by USCIS revealed that Smith was a registered sex offender on probation for a rape conviction in the state of Georgia. USCIS Immigration Officers then determined Smith may have violated the terms of his parole by relocating to Florida. After being contacted by USCIS, the Georgia Bureau of Investigations issued a warrant for Smith's arrest. Agents from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement later arrested Smith at the USCIS Miami District office on Biscayne Boulevard.

NEWS YOU CAN USE...

FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

[USCIS to Expand Premium Processing Service, 8/18/06](#)

USCIS announced the addition of two new classifications to the Premium Processing Service, EB-3 Professionals and EB-3 Skilled Workers. The Premium Processing Service allows U.S. businesses to pay a \$1,000 fee in exchange for 15-calendar-day processing of their case.

[USCIS Announces Establishment of Records Digitization Facility, 8/17/06](#)

USCIS announced the establishment of a new Records Digitization Facility in Williamsburg, Kentucky to digitize more than one million USCIS Alien-Files (A-Files) during the first phase of the inaugural project. USCIS awarded the multi-year contract to support the digitization of A-File data to Datatrac Information Services, Inc. who will operate the facility.

[Tracy Thompson to Lead USCIS HQ Office, 8/9/06](#)

USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez announced the appointment of Tracy Thompson as the agency's Chief of Equal Opportunity and Inclusion.

[Special Immigrant Status Now Available for Civilian Translators, 8/3/06](#)

Special immigrant status is now available to Afghan and Iraqi nationals who have worked directly for the United States Military as translators. This new immigration category allows translators and their families to gain admission to the United States, apply for permanent residency and eventually acquire U.S. Citizenship.



“USCIS: DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE”

OUTSTANDING AMERICANS BY CHOICE

The newly launched *Outstanding American by Choice* initiative recognizes the outstanding achievements of naturalized U.S. citizens. Through civic participation, professional achievement, and responsible citizenship, recipients of this honor have demonstrated their commitment to this country and to the common civic values that unite us as Americans. Throughout the year, USCIS Director González will continue to recognize naturalized citizens who have made significant contributions to both their communities and adopted country.



THE HONORABLE THOMAS PETER LANTOS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (CA-12) SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA

An Outstanding American by choice, Tom Lantos was born in Budapest, Hungary, on February 1, 1928. He was 16 years old when Nazi Germany occupied his native country. As a teenager, he was a member of the anti-Nazi underground and later of the anti-Communist student movement. He is the only holocaust survivor ever to serve in the U.S. Congress. Following the end of World War II, Lantos was awarded an academic scholarship to study in the United States.

Lantos received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in Economics from the University of Washington and later earned his doctorate in Economics from the University of California, Berkeley. For three decades prior to his service in Congress, Lantos was a professor of economics, an international affairs analyst for public television, and a business consultant. He is a leading advocate for Human Rights around the world and in 1983 founded the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. He and his wife Annette have two children and 17 grandchildren.

Tom Lantos has served as a Member of the United States Congress since January 3, 1981. He is currently serving his 13th term in the House of Representatives.

"My life today, given my background, is something I cannot believe possible. I am privileged to serve the Congress of the United States. I think back to my life fifty years ago, when I was a hunted animal in the jungle, and how I am dealing with issues of state of a country I love so deeply. It all seems like a dream and it all places an incredible sense of responsibility on me. I didn't achieve this because of what I am, it happened because of what this country is."

- Representative Tom Lantos

VISIT THE [OFFICE OF CITIZENSHIP](#) TO LEARN ABOUT OTHER [OUTSTANDING AMERICANS BY CHOICE](#)

ON ANY GIVEN DAY AT USCIS...

...the 15,000 federal and contract employees of USCIS accomplish the following at our 250 offices worldwide:

- Complete **135,000** national security background checks
- Answer phone inquiries from **82,000** calls to our toll-free customer service phone line
- Process **30,000** applications for immigrant benefits

Check the [USCIS Today](#) October issue or [USCIS Day in the Life](#) for more statistics on what we do every day to effectively and efficiently administer our nation's immigration system.

www.USCIS.gov

FACES OF AMERICA

NEW CITIZENS...UNIQUE STORIES

MAXIMILIANO PRUNEDA - PAREDES

For most 20 year olds, the thought of life in general along with future plans seem as far away as a distant planet. For Maximiliano Pruneda - Paredes, that planet is literally staring him in the face. Pruneda - Paredes, a native of Mexico, has been in the hospital since May 2006, with kidney complications. His mother Maria Pruneda donated her kidney approximately six years ago and now complications have arisen and his prognosis does not look favorable.

Maximiliano, applied to become a United States citizen but when it came time to attend the ceremony, he was too weak to do so. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), was contacted and without hesitation USCIS staff was sent to the Texas Children's Hospital to swear him in as a United States citizen.

Although weak, he seemed upbeat and was able to tell the USCIS staff that his dream was to one day become a doctor following in his parents footsteps. His father was an anesthesiologist, and his mother a dentist, both in Mexico. However, he realizes that for now that's an unattainable. "I help the nurses by translating for other patients, that's my way of giving back," responds Maximiliano.

When asked about her son's situation, Ms. Pruneda responds "I gave him life the first time, I gave him life when I donated my kidney, and If I could do it again, I would."



ARE YOU ONE OF THE
FACES OF AMERICA?
[SHARE YOUR STORY](#)
[WITH USCIS](#)

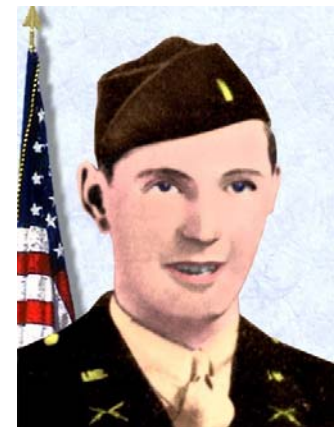
ADOPTED VALOR: IMMIGRANT HEROES

FOREIGN BORN MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS

2ND LT. ROBERT CRAIG – WWII



Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty, on 11 July 1943 at Favoratta, Sicily. 2d Lt. Craig voluntarily undertook the perilous task of locating and destroying a hidden enemy machinegun which had halted the advance of his company. Attempts by 3 other officers to locate the weapon had resulted in failure, with each officer receiving wounds. 2d Lt. Craig located the gun and snaked his way to a point within 35 yards of the hostile position before being discovered. Charging headlong into the furious automatic fire, he reached the gun, stood over it, and killed the 3 crew members with his carbine. With this obstacle removed, his company continued its advance. Shortly thereafter while advancing down the forward slope of a ridge, 2d Lt. Craig and his platoon, in a position devoid of cover and concealment, encountered the fire of approximately 100 enemy soldiers. Electing to sacrifice himself so that his platoon might carry on the battle, he ordered his men to withdraw to the cover of the crest while he drew the enemy fire to himself. With no hope of survival, he charged toward the enemy until he was within 25 yards of them. Assuming a kneeling position, he killed 5 and wounded 3 enemy soldiers. While the hostile force concentrated fire on him, his platoon reached the cover of the crest. 2d Lt. Craig was killed by enemy fire, but his intrepid action so inspired his men that they drove the enemy from the area, inflicting heavy casualties on the hostile force.



Rank and organization:
Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army
15th Infantry Battalion, 3d
Infantry Division
Birth: Scotland

USCIS: IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE



“HOW DO I...?”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT USCIS

HOW DO I...APPLY FOR U.S. CITIZENSHIP?

The decision to become a U.S. citizen is a very important one as citizenship carries many new responsibilities. Being granted U.S. citizenship is known as naturalization. In most cases, a person who wants to naturalize must first be a permanent resident. By becoming a U.S. citizen, you gain many rights that permanent residents or others do not have, including the right to vote. To be eligible for naturalization, you must first meet certain requirements set by U.S. law.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS TO APPLY FOR NATURALIZATION?

Generally, to be eligible for naturalization you must:

- Be age 18 or older; and
- Be a permanent resident for a certain amount of time (usually 5 years); and
- Be a person of good moral character; and
- Have a basic knowledge of U.S. history, government; and
- Have a period of continuous residence and physical presence in the U.S.; and
- Be able to read, write and speak basic English (With specific exceptions for age and disability).

WHEN CAN I APPLY FOR NATURALIZATION?

You may be able to apply for naturalization if you are at least 18 years of age and have been a permanent resident of the U.S.:

- For at least 5 years; or
- For at least 3 years during which time you have been, and continue to be, married to and living in marriage with your U.S. citizen husband or wife; or
- Have honorable service in the U.S. military.

Certain spouses of U.S. citizens and members of the military may be able to file for naturalization sooner.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR NATURALIZATION?

To apply for naturalization, file the *Application for Naturalization*, Form N-400. The [N-400 form](#) is available online along with additional information about naturalization procedures for [Military Personnel](#).

For more detailed information on the naturalization process, including a list of 26 frequently asked questions and information on Citizenship qualifications, please see our online manual, [A Guide to Naturalization](#), available online in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese and Vietnamese.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

Send your application, two photos, documents, and fee to the appropriate [Service Center](#). USCIS will then contact you to begin the formal naturalization process.

This process requires potential new citizens to submit fingerprints and visit a local USCIS office for an interview with an Adjudications Officer. Later, you will also be asked to take the English and U.S. Civics tests. For help preparing, USCIS has created a series of question and answer [civics flash cards](#), both available in print and online versions with audio.

Upon successful completion of these requirements, you will receive a formal decision and a Naturalization Ceremony date, where you will take the Oath of Allegiance and return your Permanent Residency Card.

The “[How Do I...?](#)” Section of USCIS Today contains answers to frequently asked questions from USCIS customers. Additional information and more answers are available English and Spanish on the [How Do I...?](#) section of USCIS.gov.



COMMUNITY RELATIONS CORNER

The Community Relations Program recently transitioned from the Office of Citizenship into the Office of Communications (OCOMM) to ensure more seamless coordination of the agency's external and internal facing communications entities. The new OCOMM structure includes Strategic Communications, Internal Communications, Multimedia Communications, Media Relations, and Community Relations. Future issues of [USCIS Today](#) will feature an ongoing Community Relations Corner to provide updates on outreach initiatives and developments.

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY RELATIONS DO FOR YOU?

In a nutshell, the community relations program is responsible for:

- Implementing initiatives to educate internal and external stakeholders on USCIS policies, processes and programs;
- Maintaining collaborative relationships with immigrant communities to identify and solve problems with mutually acceptable terms at the lowest possible level;
- Voicing immigrant concerns and needs to USCIS management;
- Providing District Offices, Regional Offices, Service Centers, ASCs and all USCIS business units with innovative and proactive outreach support on the full range of USCIS services and programs.

WHO MAKES UP THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM?

USCIS's national outreach effort is directed by Sally Blauvelt, who has been with the program since 2001. The Headquarters team is rounded out by Senior Community Relations Officer, Kathy Lotspeich, and Presidential Management Fellow, Shannon Wheeler. The outreach team in the field consists of three supervisory Community Relations Officers (CROs) located in the regional offices, and 14 full-time CROs located in key district offices.

If you have an outreach need or if your office is not staffed with a full-time CRO, call your regional CRO for assistance! They can help and they're there to serve you!

HOW DO I FIND THE NEAREST USCIS OFFICE?

USCIS.gov features an [interactive map](#) with address and contact information for every USCIS office.

Next month's Community Relations Corner will highlight the work we're doing in the area of outreach to members of the military and their families.

USCIS COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICERS:

Eastern Region - Ted Albers

Arlington - Gloria Williams-Brevard
Detroit - Hiwatha Greene-Janvier
Miami - Berta Cassidy
Philadelphia - Carol Hallstrom
New York - Shyconia Burden-Noten

Central Region - Christine Pool

Chicago - Val Obregon
Denver - Barbara Melton
San Antonio - Jacque Crouse

Western Region - Janna Evans

Laguna Niguel - Jorge Swank
Los Angeles - Rico Cabrera
Phoenix - Rudy Bustamante
Portland - Ed Sale
San Diego - John Ramirez
San Francisco - Rosemarie Fan

DON'T WAIT IN LINE...GO ONLINE!!!

[USCIS.gov](#) features an evolving suite of Internet services that decrease waiting times for customers. The [INFOPASS](#) Online appointment system, our 24-hour [National Customer Service Call Center](#), the ability to file and check the status of applications online using our [E-Filing Online Application Center](#), and other electronic media have improved our ability to both tackle the existing backlog of cases, while handling an increasing number of applicants.

USCIS: SECURING AMERICA'S PROMISE AS A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

REAL PEOPLE, REAL PROGRESS

USCIS RECOGNIZES EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

Background:

As a native of Laredo, Texas, Jessica Brewer began her career in federal service in 1995 with the U.S. Customs Service in Laredo, as a Commodity Entry Aide. In 1999, she accepted a position with the U.S. Border Patrol in Dallas, Texas, as Secretary/Border Patrol Assistant. In 2000, Jessica worked with legacy INS as an Immigration Information Officer. After a brief two year stint with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as a Detention Enforcement Officer, Jessica accepted her current position as a District Adjudications Officer with USCIS.

Jessica is married to Mr. Chad Brewer who is also a District Adjudications Officer in Dallas, and when not at USCIS they enjoy spending time with their son, Justin.



Which of your contributions to USCIS are you most proud of?

Having worked in almost every aspect of my position I'm the most proud of the work I have performed with Inter-Country Adoptions. It is a wonderful feeling to assist in uniting newly adopted children with their families here in the United States. Every benefit afforded to our customers impacts their lives however, few things in life compare to the feeling of holding your new child and bringing him/her home for the first time.

What's the most memorable moment you've experienced at USCIS?

Participating in local adoption fairs where I have been able to meet members of the adoption agencies as well as the prospective parents and their children, have been the most memorable moments of my career thus far. Seeing the end result in the eyes of the parents and their children has given me a renewed sense of pride and satisfaction in the job I do with USCIS.

How has USCIS changed since March 2003?

I believe that since March 2003, USCIS has become much more focused on the quality of the work we do as well as providing a higher level of customer service. I have also seen great progress made toward better ensuring national security. Every day seems to bring about new and innovative ways of doing our job making USCIS a great agency to work for!

Name: Jessica Brewer

Position: District Adjudications Officer

Location: Dallas, Texas

District Adjudications Officers determine applicant eligibility for a wide variety of benefits, review applications and often conduct applicant interviews. District Adjudications Officers have the dual responsibility of providing courteous service to the public while being alert to the possibility of fraud.

Visit [USAJOBS Online](#) for more information on openings and opportunities at USCIS and other federal agencies.



A MESSAGE FROM USCIS DEPUTY DIRECTOR

JONATHAN "JOCK" SCHARFEN

It is an honor and a privilege to be a part of the USCIS team. Over my past two months on the job, I traveled to several offices and met a number of you. I have been continually impressed by your talent, work-ethic and integrity. Simply put, USCIS employees are some of the best and brightest our nation has to offer.

I have been particularly impressed with your commitment to our nation's security and to our mission of administering with integrity and efficiency our nation's unique immigration system. Ours is a difficult mission and one that we can rightly take pride in accomplishing.

I look forward to serving with you and hearing your ideas and suggestions on how we can be a better agency and better serve our nation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT USCIS OCOMM 202.272.1200