

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2018

L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Director Cissna:

We write because are alarmed by the new mission statement of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which omits language from the previous mission statement of “the promise of the United States as a nation of immigrants,” and we urge you to reverse this change of important, longstanding policy and identity.

Any executive branch office is of course free to revise its mission statement within its discretion. However, it is extremely concerning that USCIS would choose to delete this particular phrase given current events in the world. This change suggests that the agency is ignoring our nation’s heritage by driving a wedge between immigrants and native-born Americans, and suggests that the agency does not equally value such individuals under the law. Except for Native Americans, it is factually correct that all Americans descended from people who came from someplace else. Our nation was founded by immigrants seeking a better life. Moreover, immigrants are undeniably a core component of our country’s cultural and economic identity. Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths as a nation. Your agency - which is responsible for administering our immigration laws and processing applications for permanent residence and citizenship from those who come to America seeking a better life – must understand this.

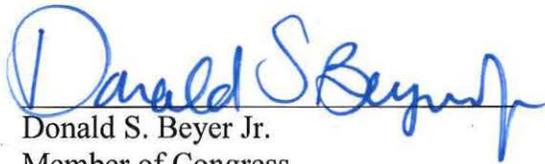
On February 22, 2018, you stated the following regarding the agency’s new mission statement: “I believe this simple, straightforward statement clearly defines the agency’s role in our country’s lawful immigration system and the commitment we have to the American people.” You did not specifically address the decision to delete the phrase, “the United States as a nation of immigrants.” We respectfully request an explanation of your decision to remove this language from USCIS’ mission statement.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



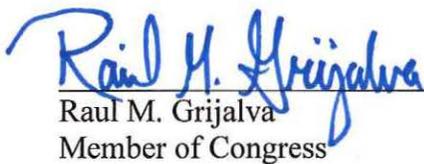
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



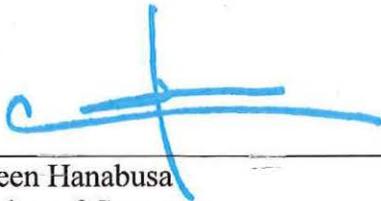
Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress



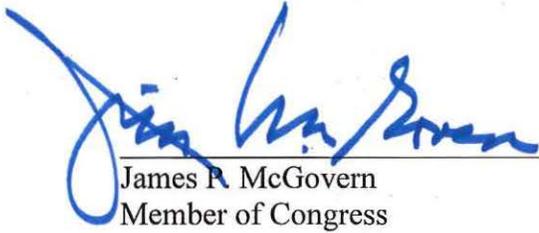
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



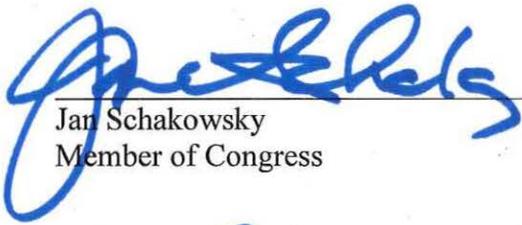
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



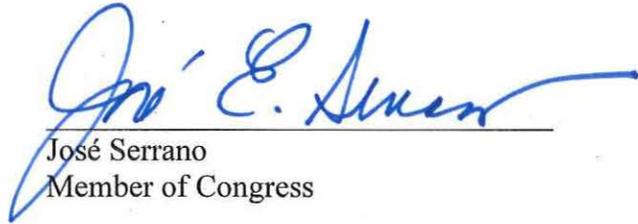
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



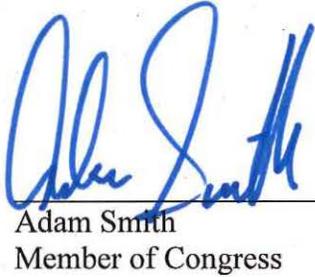
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



José Serrano
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

May 11, 2018

The Honorable Brendan F. Boyle
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Boyle:

Thank you for your March 12, 2018 letter. I appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns about the new U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) mission statement:

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation's lawful immigration system, safeguarding its integrity and promise by efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits while protecting Americans, securing the homeland, and honoring our values.

As I stated in the email I sent on February 22, 2018, to USCIS employees announcing the new mission statement, I believe this simple, straightforward statement clearly defines the agency's role in our country's lawful immigration system and the commitment we have to the American people.¹ The absence of the phrase "nation of immigrants" from the new mission statement does not take away from the fact that, as you state in your letter, "[e]xcept for Native Americans, ... all Americans descended from people who came from someplace else." That is undeniable, and its presence or absence in a bureaucratic mission statement does not make it any more or less true.

The old mission statement did not accurately describe the full scope of what USCIS does. It also mischaracterized the work that the agency does (e.g. "granting" rather than "adjudicating" immigration and citizenship benefits), and it eroded the dignity and importance of the work of USCIS while confusing employees and the public about who USCIS serves. In the same email referenced above, I said:

"What we do at USCIS is so important to our nation, so meaningful to the applicants and petitioners, and the nature of the work is often so complicated, that we should never allow our work to be regarded as a mere production line or even described in business or commercial terms. In particular, referring to applicants and petitioners for immigration benefits, and the beneficiaries of such applications and petitions, as "customers" promotes an institutional culture that emphasizes the ultimate satisfaction of applicants and petitioners, rather than the correct adjudication of such applications and petitions according to the law. Use of the term leads to the erroneous belief that applicants and petitioners, rather than the American people, are whom we ultimately serve. All applicants and petitioners should, of course, always be treated with the greatest respect and courtesy, but we can't forget that we serve the American people."

¹ USCIS Director L. Francis Cissna on New Agency Mission Statement (Feb. 22, 2018), <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/uscis-director-l-francis-cissna-new-agency-mission-statement>.

The text of the new mission statement is structured around the fundamental responsibility of USCIS: administering the nation's lawful immigration system. The rest of the mission statement describes *how* USCIS accomplishes that. In particular, the mission statement describes how USCIS safeguards the integrity and promise of the lawful immigration system that it administers. I believe that the promise of the U.S. immigration system is that every application or petition will be adjudicated correctly, under the law, and, most importantly, will be adjudicated *fairly and impartially*: everyone – rich or poor, citizen or alien – is treated equally, respectfully, and according to the law. That is the most important promise of our immigration system.

The new mission statement reflects the dedication of the thousands of civil servants working on behalf of USCIS and our nation, as well as the expectations of prospective immigrants who desire to be a part of this country. The new mission statement seeks to be more inclusive of the totality of the agency's work, and through the improvements we made to the statement, we sought to show even greater respect for all the people with whom we interact and for the American people, whom we serve.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important matter. The co-signers of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance or to schedule a briefing, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Francis Cissna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

L. Francis Cissna
Director