

Moderator: Jennifer Shapiro (JPMorgan Chase). Panelist: Dan Renaud (USCIS Field Office Directorate)

Jennifer Shapiro: Okay. Let's get into it. We have a lot of questions and we have some time at the end, hopefully, for questions from the audience but we're going to start with some opening announcement.

Dan Renaud: Hi. Good morning, everyone. It's nice to be here and to address you today. There're a few things going on in USCIS. We've been kind of busy. I think that as you see stories or you see news releases, we have a multi-faceted mission at USCIS. We are the agency that adjudicates immigration benefits. We also have a law enforcement responsibility to coordinate with our colleagues in ICE and other federal, state and local authorities. I think that it's important to remember that what we try to do and some people say we try to balance those two things. I think that when you use the word balance, it would indicate that as one goes down the other goes up and you kind of balance. We don't try to balance. We try to provide the best, fastest, most professional immigration service to those individuals who are deserving of a benefit, and we also try to provide the quickest and most effective fraud detection coordination with law enforcement for those bad actors who try to impugn the integrity of the system that I've spent the last 30 years of my life working toward.

So while it seems that there is a fair amount of press about tip lines and about other activities that are facilitated, arrests in field operations, we don't think this is in any way a deviation from our mission but an opportunity that we have now to fulfill the part of our mission that in the past week, we have not been as aggressively pursuing.

So while immigration benefits is in our DNA, there's nothing better in my day than swearing in new citizens. We need to remember that part of ensuring that that new citizen is eligible and is going to add to the national fabric is to ensure that the system through which they obtain those benefits has the integrity that we would all expect.

Jennifer Shapiro: Okay, great. Okay. We're going to get into it. We have a number of topics and the way we're going to do this is we're going to break them down by topic and then have each agency comment on them. And we'll start with you, Dan, around volumes at the USCIS. What's the processing volume look like at USCIS in the last year and I guess you could break it down into adjustment of status interviews, employment-based, H-1Bs and other categories of petitions.

Dan Renaud: Okay. So as you may know in the last year we have had some changes in those applicants that we invite for an interview prior to adjusting their status to permanent residents. Over a year ago, typically we would see spousal petitions so those immigrating either in the IR6 category or an occasional preference spouse and their families. Pretty much for adjustment of status, that was the mainstay of our applications. Occasionally we would see an individual seeking to remove conditions on permanent residence that was referred by the

service center for an employment-based case that was referred by the service center.

We realized in the last year that in order to, again, improve the integrity of our system, we have a goal now to interview all applicants who seek to obtain a permanent benefit in the United States. I don't know when. We don't have a time line per se but in pursuit of that goal, last year after the March 6 Executive Order, we decided that we would interview all employment-based adjustment of status cases filed on or after March 6, based on an approved I-140.

So we are seeing those cases rolling through. I think it's going very well so that would include not only interviewing the immigrant employee, but also his or her family members who would be following to join. The population of individuals coming in for interviews last year including naturalization was about 1.2 million. We think that that will increase by between 30 and 35 percent. So we are taking some actions in our local offices to improve our capacity.

The first six months of this year has seen more completions than any of the previous four years and so – we'll talk about processing times in a little bit – while our processing times are up, we chalked it up to our popularity, not because of our inability to move cases. This has been a very good year for us in terms of throughput so we think that we will. We are on pace to exhaust the EB numbers this year. That was one of our goals working with service centers and it looks like we will be there. I don't have a lot of information about the H1Bs. I don't work in that area anymore but I know that they are working through the cap cases and I think that they have a lot of very talented people who've worked those for years. Cap season in service centers is like getting ready for holiday.

Jennifer Shapiro: Yeah, we know.

Dan Renaud: The opposite of a holiday. It's a holiday with a lot of work.

Jennifer Shapiro: It always falls on spring break so that's great for all of us, too. And in terms of the increased volumes, are you also increasing staffing or not so much?

Dan Renaud: So we are increasing staffing where we can. One of our challenges in Field Operations is that our footprint is fixed and we have 88 field offices across the United States. We're certainly not able to increase our footprint in 88 locations so we are looking at better ways to utilize the space we have. I don't think that we will be able to hire our way out of this backlog.

We have a team in Field Operations that is looking for new and improved methods to new and improved processes. We think it takes too long to train somebody and we need to find a way to get new employees more productive at a high rate of quality. Those who've known me for a while know that I always grimace when I hear somebody say, "Well that happened because it's a new employee." You don't get a reduced fee because you file with a new employee who's adjudicating it. So that standard of excellence should be there no matter who is adjudicating the case and we need to find a way to make sure that that quality comes through every time.

One of the things that you'll see in some of the offices, we have started a pilot program where

we're changing the way in which we are providing information to applicants and petitioners. In six of our offices, we have essentially changed the way we handle InfoPass appointments.

Applicants are no longer able to go online and request an InfoPass appointment. They are channeled through the website or the contact center where most of their information questions can be handled. If they need service such as an added stamp, and we can talk about that a little bit, or emergency advance parole or some other document or actual service, then they would be able to get an InfoPass appointment.

What we've seen is that about 80 percent of the people who otherwise would have made InfoPass appointments are being served by the call center. They're being served more quickly. They're being served without having to travel to the office, take a day off from work and all that that entails and those who actually need service, the average time in a couple of the offices -- and I look at all the data, it's still a pilot -- has decreased for someone to come in, for example, for an added stamp has decreased from eleven days to four days.

So we think that is a win-win for us and for applicants and we think that we'll be able to take the capacity that we free up and pour that into adjudication of cases. So hoping to glean some capacity there.

Jennifer Shapiro: Okay, let's go on to processing times and efficiencies. How have the processing times changed in the past year and what types of visas have you seen longer processing times for?

Dan Renaud: Okay. So in Field Operations, we have seen an increase in processing times for both N-400s, naturalization applications and for adjustment of status.

We attempt to make sure that those go up or down at the same rate so most offices will have their dates fairly close to each other probably within about two months.

In the run up to the last presidential election, we knew that we were going to have a large influx, large increase in naturalization applications. We expected that to drop off after the election. It didn't and so in the run up to the previous election we spent a lot of time and effort trying to make sure that whether you lived in Seattle or Saint Louis or -- I'm trying to think of an east coast "s" town but Savannah, I guess. We don't have an office in Savannah but anyway, your wait time, your processing time for N-400s would be about the same and I think we were pretty successful in that. With the growth in numbers we've seen since then we have had some larger variances.

Now I think the quickest office is about seven months for naturalization, the longest being about sixteen and we're working to bring those closer and similarly for adjustment of status we are at about eight and fifteen I think is about where we are so we do manage those carefully. We simply were not able to, especially in some of our office to manage the huge increases that they saw during FY16 and '17. With respect to how we are communicating cycle times or processing times, we have changed -- about a month or two ago we changed the way -- previously on our website we would put a date specific how long it would take or how many

months or what date we were adjudicating.

We found that for users of the website that was confusing because for a whole host of reasons. So what we're doing now is we have identified four forms where we are taking the previous month's completion data and looking at cases that were completed between the 50th and the 93rd percentile and then indicating on our website that for that case type, that is the range that customers can expect we are currently taking for that case type in that particular office.

So instead of having a single date there, you will have a range of number of months. We've done that mathematically for N-400s, for I-90s, which is the replacement green card, for the I-485, for adjustment of status and the I-751 which is the removal of conditions on residence. But the other processing times that we post will also have a range and now customers who are looking to file an SRMT, a service request -- if they believe their case is outside normal processing time, they would need to wait until after the lengthier date.

So in the past we had, for example, Chicago I think was at nine months for N-400s. That means on nine month and one day we would take an outside normal processing time. Now that date is I think between like eight and eleven months and so we would take one after eleven months. The difference there is that we know that some of those cases are older than nine months. It doesn't mean that it's lost. It doesn't mean that applicants need to remind us that they have a case pending. We just, for whatever reason, either because we requested evidence or there was a reschedule or a second interview, those cases are taking a little bit longer than the average. So we hope that you'll find those more informative. Certainly, there are opportunities to comment on the information you're getting from the website and we would encourage you to do that. But we think it gives a better picture of what applicants can expect.

Jennifer Shapiro: Thank you.