



STATEMENT

July 31, 2000

Response to Citizenship USA Report

The Inspector General's review of Citizenship USA sought to answer the same question that had previously been addressed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and others—what caused the breakdowns in the naturalization system during the CUSA program?

The Inspector General's report tracks the previous reviews and lays out the factors that led INS—more than three years ago—to implement a complete overhaul of the naturalization system. The sudden expansion of a manual system designed to handle fewer than 300,000 naturalization applications per year to accommodate a fourfold workload increase overwhelmed its capacity and magnified the deficiencies of a system that had been neglected for decades.

When INS was faced with problems in the naturalization system that were seriously threatening the integrity of the process, the agency committed to overhauling its entire service operations, focusing first on ensuring the integrity of the naturalization system. Changes included: implementing quality assurance procedures along with appropriate oversight provisions, opening more than 120 INS fingerprinting sites to exercise control over the fingerprinting of applicants, and improving the efficiency of the background check process that guarantees INS has reviewed the criminal history of all applicants before approving the application. A series of audits by both outside auditor KPMG Peat Marwick (KPMG) and INS have validated the success of these efforts.

Having successfully ensured the integrity of the naturalization system, INS moved forward in August 1998 with a two-year initiative to clear the backlog of naturalization applications that developed following Citizenship USA. With bipartisan congressional support, INS achieved the first-year goal of the initiative and is on track to complete the backlog reduction and decrease processing times to the historically based six-month national average while continuing to guarantee the quality of the naturalization program.

While INS has made significant strides in improving the naturalization system, as the Inspector General's report points out, there is some unfinished business that the agency needs to complete. Efforts are ongoing to build on the progress that INS has made and to continue to advance quality and customer service throughout the agency.