

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

PEN AND PAD

NEW NATURALIZATION TEST

September 27, 2007

9:50 a.m. EDT

USCIS
Directors Conference Room
20 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Participants:

Emilio T. Gonzalez, Director
Alfonso Aguilar, Chief of the
Office of Citizenship
Jose Montero, Chief of the
Office of Communications
Chris Bentley, Press Secretary
Chris Rhatigan, Media Relations Manager
Dr. Michael Jones, Project Manager,
Naturalization Test Redesign
Stephen Hale, USCIS

Hemma Santos, English as a Second Language Teacher
Members of the Press

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. BENTLEY: Welcome to this morning's pen
3 and pad with Dr. Emilio Gonzalez, the Director of U.S.
4 Citizenship and Immigration Services. We're going to
5 discuss the new naturalization test.

6 Joining Dr. Gonzalez this morning is Mr.
7 Alfonso Aguilar, who is the Chief of our Office of
8 Citizenship, and also Dr. Michael Jones, who is the
9 Project Manager for the naturalization test redesign
10 effort, and Jose Montero, our Chief of the Office of
11 Communications here at USCIS.

12 I've got about an hour set aside for this
13 morning's opportunity here, and I've got one camera in
14 the room, going to shoot about five minutes of B-roll,
15 just so you know what's happening. We're also joined
16 this morning by a number of your colleagues from
17 around the country who have joined us in the listen-
18 only mode to today's conversation. And we are
19 transcribing today's conversation as well so we can
20 memorialize it and we can get it up on the web
21 sometime tomorrow and have it available for everyone
22 as a permanent record of what we're discussing here

1 this morning.

2 Because of the transcribing, two ground
3 rules. One, as we get started, I'd like to have
4 everyone here that's a member of the meeting
5 introduce themselves. And second, when it gets to the
6 question and answer portion of this morning, please
7 identify yourself by name and by outlet so we can make
8 it a little easier as we do the transcription of
9 today's meeting.

10 And with that said, if we could start with
11 Michelle, we'll introduce everyone to the Director.

12 PARTICIPANT: Michelle Middlestadt, Houston
13 Chronicle.

14 PARTICIPANT: Eleanor Stables, Congressional
15 Quarterly.

16 PARTICIPANT: Eunice Moscoso, Cox
17 Newspapers.

18 PARTICIPANT: Stephen Dinan, The Washington
19 Times.

20 PARTICIPANT: Karin Brulliard, Washington
21 Post.

22 PARTICIPANT: Nicole Gaouette, Los Angeles

1 Times.

2 PARTICIPANT: Emily Bazar, USA Today.

3 PARTICIPANT: Dave Montgomery from McClatchy
4 Newspapers.

5 PARTICIPANT: Suzanne Gamboa from AP.

6 PARTICIPANT: Mary Lynn Hastings, La Guinon

7 MR. BENTLEY: And then across the back.

8 PARTICIPANT: Lori Montenegro, Telemundo.

9 PARTICIPANT: Hernando Pisaro, Univision.

10 PARTICIPANT: Lisa Peramontez, Hispanic
11 Communications Network.

12 PARTICIPANT: Do you want to go ahead and
13 have the camera leave?

14 MR. BENTLEY: I'm sure we could take a few
15 more minutes as the director starts, and then we can
16 have her leave. Director, it's your --

17 DR. GONZALEZ: Thank you all for being here.

18 I'm going to be unusually brief, more brief than I
19 was a couple days ago, because this is really a
20 project that belongs to our Office of Citizenship, and
21 one of the neat things about being know charge of this
22 agency is I get to take credit for other people's

1 work.

2 But the fact is that this is a project which
3 if you recall several months ago we decided to launch
4 this pilot, and through several months of hard work,
5 testing, meeting with community groups and actually
6 administering the test, we were able to fine tune the
7 questions. We were able to gather a great deal of
8 empirical data, and we're very excited about the fact
9 that we have what we collectively believe here is a
10 much better product.

11 This is a naturalization test which
12 genuinely captures the applicant's knowledge of what
13 it is he's about ready to be -- a United States
14 citizen. It's no longer a test about how many stars
15 are on the flag or how many stripes. It's a test that
16 genuinely talks about those things that make America
17 what it is. It's a test that describes and captures
18 the applicant's knowledge of those aspects of American
19 history, society and civics that they will one day be
20 raising their hands to support.

21 So we're very, very excited, not only about
22 the content of the test, but we're very excited about

1 the results from the test pilot and our plans for
2 future use of this test.

3 So with that, and you can open it up for
4 questions later, which I encourage you to, I'd like to
5 pass this over to Alfonso Aguilar, who is the Chief of
6 our Office of Citizenship. Alfonso and his office
7 have been working on this for I would say years, and
8 all the work that was done is a testament to the fine
9 work and energy that they put into this project.

10 MR. AGUILAR: Well, thank you, Director.
11 And I should begin also by thanking the director for
12 his report of the Office of Citizenship on this
13 important project.

14 At this time I also want to Hemma Santos, an
15 ESL instructor and educator, adult educator, who
16 served in our panel of education professionals who
17 provided advice as we developed the test, and also who
18 validated the naturalization exam. Hemma is based in
19 Miami, and she teaches immigrants civics and
20 citizenship and helps them prepare for the
21 naturalization exam.

22 As the Director clearly stated, we believe

1 that this new test will certainly encourage civic
2 learning and patriotism. One of the goals of the test
3 is certainly to measure basic knowledge of U.S.
4 history and civics. But its main purpose is really to
5 require applicants to study the fundamentals of
6 American democracy. The theory is that as they study
7 the fundamentals of our history and civics, they will
8 also identify with them and become attached to our
9 country.

10 We believe that this new test will be
11 meaningful in the sense that it covers the
12 fundamentals of U.S. history and civics, it covers a
13 basic U.S. history curriculum, and it's also fair in
14 the sense that it will be administered in a standard
15 manner in every USCIS office.

16 This test is also part of the Bush
17 Administration efforts to promote assimilation. As
18 you may remember, this is one of the points or one of
19 the initiatives of the 26 initiatives announced by
20 Secretary Chertoff and Gutierrez this summer.

21 As we began developing this exam, we
22 developed a technical plan which culminated, as the

1 Director was mentioning, in the piloting of 142
2 questions that we made public last December, as you
3 may remember. We conducted the pilot, the main pilot,
4 in ten different sites. They were selected randomly
5 based on geographic diversity as well as different
6 workload size of each office. We wanted to -- a pilot
7 at large as well as smaller sized offices. Over 6,000
8 volunteers participated in this pilot. And the pass
9 rate on the pilot was very high -- 92.4 percent.

10 On the pilot, pilot participants only took
11 the test once. Normally, the naturalization process,
12 with one application fee, you can take the test twice.

13 If you don't pass the first time, you can take it a
14 second time. The pass rate -- the current pass rate
15 on the first try is 84 percent. So, actually, the
16 pass rate went up on the pilot compared to that 84
17 percent. Based on -- from those results, we narrowed
18 down the list to 100 questions. We took out the
19 questions that pilot participants across the board had
20 difficulty with and that did not cover critical
21 fundamental concepts.

22 Difficult questions were usually questions

1 that were not at the appropriate language level or
2 were too confusing, that across the board,
3 participants did not understand. For those items that
4 were confusing or not of the appropriate language
5 level but covered critical, fundamental concepts, we
6 reworded them. There were about 15 to 16 items that
7 had to be reworded, and they were re-piloted again.

8 And to complement this pilot, we also
9 conducted a secondary study. We went to 64 adult
10 education sites all over the country to test the exam
11 items with English learners. Now, in the secondary
12 study we did not replicate the interview that we do at
13 field offices. We just tested the items to get a
14 sense of how low literacy English learners would do
15 with the new items, and the results of the secondary
16 study confirmed the results of the main study in the
17 sense that they showed that English learners had the
18 same problems or difficulty with the same questions
19 that main pilot participants had a problem with.

20 Now we're not administering the test right
21 away. We have told immigrants and immigrant-serving
22 organizations that we're going to give them a year to

1 prepare for the new exam. That will allow them to
2 prepare new educational material, restructure their
3 classes and curriculum. So, administration will begin
4 October 1st, 2008, and that's very important. This is
5 not going to happen overnight. We're going to start
6 administering the test in a year.

7 Now in that year, USCIS will also develop
8 educational material to help immigrants prepare for
9 the exam. We are going to hold outreach sessions
10 throughout the country to meet with adult educators
11 and organizations that work with immigrants to brief
12 them on the new exam. Also, we're going to provide
13 training to adjudicators on how to administer the new
14 exam.

15 And finally, we're going to hold throughout,
16 beginning in October 26th in Miami -- and this is also
17 part of the Administration initiatives to promote the
18 assimilation of immigrants -- we're going to begin
19 holding training sessions on how to teach civics and
20 citizenship to immigrants for educators and volunteers
21 that work with immigrants. And as I've said, the
22 first session will be October 26th in Miami. And

1 we're hoping to hold 8 to 10 regional training
2 sessions throughout the country.

3 Having said that, again, I think we have --
4 we accomplished what we wanted. We developed a test
5 within the framework of U.S. naturalization policy.
6 Our naturalization policy is nonpunitive. We don't
7 seek to fail anyone. If you meet the requirements of
8 the naturalization process, are of good moral
9 character, the years of permanent residency, and you
10 study for the test, then you should become a citizen.

11 And I think what we've achieved through this process
12 is a better test, concept-oriented, that follows a
13 basic U.S. and civics curriculum but is not harder.

14 And with that, I'll pass it on to the
15 Director.

16 DR. GONZALEZ: I'll open it up for questions
17 now if you'd like.

18 PARTICIPANT: I notice on the --

19 DR. GONZALEZ: Give me your name first.

20 PARTICIPANT: I'm sorry. Suzanne from AP.
21 I notice on the stats you're issuing that when you
22 break it down by race, you haven't broken out non-

1 Hispanic white and Hispanic white. Do you have those
2 numbers broken down?

3 MR. AGUILAR: No. We have -- because we
4 usually don't collect that type of data at our
5 naturalization interviews, what we do have is the
6 numbers of countries of origin. In the main pilot,
7 over 55 percent of participants were from Mexico,
8 Central America and South America. So a large number
9 of Hispanics, perhaps the majority of pilot
10 participants, were Hispanic. Asian participation was
11 fairly high as well, 20 percent.

12 So, yeah, we don't have it by racial or
13 ethnic group, but we do have it by country of origin,
14 and it's over 55 percent were from Latin America.

15 PARTICIPANT: And do you have a passing rate
16 for the people in ESL classes?

17 MR. AGUILAR: No. Because the way the
18 secondary study was done, if there wasn't an actual
19 interview, we didn't administer the entire test. We
20 were just testing the items to see how English
21 learners would respond.

22 DR. GONZALEZ: You were validating

1 questions.

2 MR. AGUILAR: Exactly.

3 PARTICIPANT: So my understanding was that
4 the reason that you went to the ESL classes was
5 because you were getting a lot of volunteers who were
6 people who were more likely to pass the test. So I
7 kind of wonder if you didn't check the pass rates of
8 the folks that are ESL, how do you have a good sense
9 of whether that's going to work for people who
10 wouldn't volunteer.

11 MR. AGUILAR: Yes. First of all, we can't
12 say that those who took the test were well educated or
13 were already English speakers. We can't conclude
14 that. In fact, if you look at the numbers, you know,
15 considering that 55 percent were from Latin America, a
16 lot of our low literacy applicants actually do come
17 from Latin America, so --

18 DR. GONZALEZ: The other thing to that is
19 also if you take the pilot and you fail, you still get
20 a chance to take the old test twice.

21 MR. AGUILAR: Right. Right.

22 DR. GONZALEZ: So people will get an

1 opportunity of taking the test three times.

2 MR. AGUILAR: Right. But we realize that
3 there was the potential for results being skewed, not
4 that it happened. There was the potential. So that's
5 why we went to adult education sites. The problem is
6 that it's impossible within the timeframe that we had
7 to replicate the test administration that we do in a
8 naturalization interview at adult education sites.

9 So what the secondary study does, it gives
10 us an indication of how English learners would do.
11 But it's not a replication of the main pilot. So we
12 did get a sense that they had difficulty with the same
13 items that pilot participants had a problem with.

14 Yes?

15 PARTICIPANT: Michelle Middlestadt, Houston
16 Chronicle. In light of the fact that more half of our
17 pilot volunteers were Hispanic but the pass rate is
18 significantly lower for Central American country-of-
19 origin test takers than further west in the
20 population, I mean, is there a concern here that the
21 test is harder for them or that you're not going to
22 have the same success rate?

1 MR. AGUILAR: No. I think across the board,
2 the numbers are pretty high. I mean, you're going to
3 see even in the pilot that in some cities,
4 participants did better than in other cities. So
5 we're just giving you an average pass rate.

6 You know, the numbers are still high -- can
7 I see that? I just want to --

8 PARTICIPANT: But it's like 10 percent lower
9 than some of your other --

10 DR. GONZALEZ: But it's still higher than
11 the old test results.

12 MR. AGUILAR: It's still higher than the --
13 remember, it's 85 percent compared to the pass rate on
14 the first try on the current exam, which is 84
15 percent. So, it's still higher.

16 And remember, you know, this is a pilot. I
17 mean, something else that we're going to do, we're
18 going to continue monitoring as we start administering
19 next year the exam, we're going to monitor how
20 applicants do. So, we're going to conduct a new
21 record study to see how immigrants are doing.

22 But as I've said before, across the board,

1 the numbers are higher than the current pass rate.
2 So, it's -- you know, it's 85 percent. It's still
3 very high compared to 92 percent. I'm not concerned
4 really, no.

5 PARTICIPANT: And with this additional
6 testing that you're going to be doing, you're then
7 open to tweaking some of the questions if you find it?

8 MR. AGUILAR: Well, eventually, we could
9 tweak questions. But the main content is there.
10 These are the 100 questions. What could happen a year
11 or two from now is that if we see that people are
12 having major problems with one or two questions, we
13 could tweak the language, you know, with the advice of
14 our adult educators. But what you're seeing now is
15 the 100 questions and the content. And this is going
16 to be final.

17 So, we don't foresee major changes because
18 people have done very well.

19 MR. JONES: And when people took the pilot
20 also -- Mike Jones. When people took the pilot also,
21 they were studying for 142 questions. And now of
22 course in the real test, it's going to be down to they

1 will have to study for 100 again, and a lot of the
2 more difficult questions were taken out, so it will be
3 a lot easier.

4 MR. AGUILAR: And that's a very, very good
5 point. It's 92.4 percent pass rate on the 142
6 questions, which contained 15 to 16 questions that
7 were fairly difficult. So now with taking those --
8 rewording those questions, we feel that the pass rate
9 may stay at that level or may actually go up.

10 Yes?

11 PARTICIPANT: Dave Montgomery, McClatchy
12 Newspapers. Have you all consulted with immigrant
13 support groups and advocacy groups on these changes?
14 And what kind of feedback do you get from them?

15 MR. AGUILAR: Yeah. We've conducted a lot
16 of outreach to immigrant-serving organizations, but
17 not only immigrant-serving organizations and immigrant
18 advocacy groups, also scholars, think tanks.

19 And we received a lot of input, a lot of
20 very constructive input. In some cases, we actually
21 incorporated that input, or in many cases, I would
22 say. And we also heard from scholars, from civics

1 scholars and history scholars. So we conducted a
2 great deal of outreach with stakeholders.

3 PARTICIPANT: Lori Montenegro, Telemundo
4 Network.

5 MR. AGUILAR: Yes.

6 PARTICIPANT: Two questions. Number one,
7 seeking clarification on something that you just said
8 about taking the test, the number of times you could
9 take the test.

10 MR. AGUILAR: Yes.

11 PARTICIPANT: So it's October 1st, 2008, you
12 start giving the new test.

13 MR. AGUILAR: Yes.

14 PARTICIPANT: Somebody fails it. Then they
15 could go and have the option of taking the old test?

16 MR. AGUILAR: Okay. I'll explain that. And
17 also in the briefing material that we're going to
18 distribute, that information is contained there. But
19 the question is, if you apply before October 1st of
20 '08 and are scheduled for an interview after October
21 1st of '08, you will have the option of taking the new
22 exam or the old exam.

1 If you apply after October 1st of '08, you
2 will take the new exam.

3 PARTICIPANT: What happens if you fail that
4 exam if you take your test after October 1st because
5 you applied after October 1st 2008?

6 DR. GONZALEZ: You fail.

7 PARTICIPANT: And you fail the test. What
8 happens?

9 MR. AGUILAR: The first time? You would
10 take it a second time, but it's the new test.

11 PARTICIPANT: The same new test?

12 MR. AGUILAR: Exactly.

13 PARTICIPANT: Okay.

14 DR. GONZALEZ: What we were talking about
15 earlier was the pilot, and the people that volunteered
16 for the pilot, if they failed, they could still go
17 back and take the old test if they wanted.

18 PARTICIPANT: And the other thing I wanted
19 to ask you, somewhere I read that some of the
20 questions were going to be in -- you were going to put
21 them in other languages?

22 MR. AGUILAR: Well, first, for study

1 materials, yes. Because remember that there are some
2 waivers for the elderly who've been here for a long
3 time as permanent residents that allow -- but that's a
4 very small number of applicants -- that can take the
5 test in their own language. So we already have
6 actually the questions of the current exam in Spanish
7 on the web, so we will translate them for that
8 community. But that's very small. Those are very
9 specific waivers that are part of legislation.
10 They're legislated.

11 PARTICIPANT: I wanted to ask you a
12 question. You were beginning to say if you fail it
13 for a second time?

14 MR. AGUILAR: If you fail it a second time,
15 just like now, you have to apply all over again. I
16 mean, you can take the test as many times as you want.
17 The problem is that if you fail it a second time, you
18 have to reapply.

19 PARTICIPANT: Coming back as a two?

20 MR. AGUILAR: Exactly. So what I'm saying
21 is with one fee, you get to take the test twice. If
22 you fail it twice, you have to take it again.

1 PARTICIPANT: Stephen Dinan, Washington
2 Times. What are some of the -- can you give us some
3 examples of questions you reworded and the ones that
4 were giving -- that were causing problems? And for
5 that matter, do you have a sense for which ones that
6 are still on the 100 list right now are the toughest?

7 DR. GONZALEZ: We should all -- you are
8 going to take the test before you leave, right?

9 (Laughter.)

10 MR. AGUILAR: Michael, can you --

11 DR. GONZALEZ: You know, one of the things
12 to keep in mind, Stephen, is even though the pass rate
13 is higher, it doesn't make the test any easier. What
14 it does mean is you have to study more. Currently, if
15 you're really on your toes and you're smart, you could
16 probably take the test without studying.

17 PARTICIPANT: How do you know that? How do
18 you know that it's not easier and that they study for
19 it?

20 DR. GONZALEZ: Pardon me?

21 PARTICIPANT: How do you know that, that
22 it's not -- that it's easier than if they studied

1 more?

2 DR. GONZALEZ: Because the questions are
3 much different. The questions are more about meaning
4 and understanding than rote memorization. If you are
5 a fairly intelligent person and you've been around for
6 a while, you could probably sit and take the 10-
7 question math test right now and do very well without
8 studying. This is the kind of test that you can't do
9 that. You really have to sit down and study. And you
10 know what? If you study from the study materials,
11 you're going to do well. So at no point are we trying
12 to dumb down the test. What we're trying to do is
13 encourage studying and encourage comprehension and
14 encourage meaning so that when you do walk in and take
15 the test, you're going to do well. And you know what?
16 And if you study all the stuff, you will do well.

17 MR. AGUILAR: I'll give you an example. I
18 have one of the Federalist papers. I think that's a
19 good one.

20 MR. JONES: Okay.

21 MR. AGUILAR: On the 142 questions, there
22 was a question of what was one of the purposes of the

1 Federalist papers? I don't have the exact language of
2 that question. A lot of people were having problems
3 with that question, and I think it was the language
4 level. That's question 67.

5 So we reworded it by saying the Federalist
6 papers reported the passage of the U.S. Constitution.

7 Name one of the writers, Hamilton, Jake or Madison.
8 Now that's fairly simple, and we want to keep it
9 simple. But the point is, we want to make sure that
10 they understand as they study the main purpose of the
11 Federalist papers that was to promote the ratification
12 of the Constitution.

13 PARTICIPANT: But isn't that the exact
14 opposite of that you're trying to move away from rote
15 memorization. You've just reduced sort of a critical
16 thinking question back down to the level of rote
17 memorization of three names.

18 MR. AGUILAR: No, because rote -- as we see
19 rote, in every process of learning, there is
20 memorization. So we're not against memorization. In
21 any process of learning, be it history, be it
22 chemistry, you're going to have to memorize some

1 facts. But we want to leave for memorization are
2 fundamental facts. What we're against is rote
3 memorization of trivial and arbitrary facts that have
4 no impact in a citizen's life or do not cover
5 fundamental concepts of American democracy.

6 DR. GONZALEZ: What are the three colors of
7 the flag, for example, you know.

8 MR. JONES: And as you can see in that
9 particular question, the content area is still
10 embedded within the question itself. So it wasn't
11 that the whole thing was thrown out. It was just
12 reworded so that they would still be learning this
13 concept, but the answer that they have to give is not
14 quite as complicated.

15 MR. AGUILAR: As they study for that
16 question, you know, they will read about the passage
17 of the U.S. Constitution. So this again, the theory
18 behind the test, and I said at the very beginning,
19 it's really not about, you know, we have to take tests
20 on basic knowledge. But the main purpose is actually
21 to require people to study. And hopefully by
22 studying, they will identify with those principles.

1 So it's really not a question of having an
2 easier or harder test. It's a test that -- it's a
3 better test and encourages attachment.

4 PARTICIPANT: The old test, the one that's
5 being, you know, administered right now has, I think
6 it's four choices, right? You know, for an answer?

7 MR. AGUILAR: No. It has actually just one
8 answer for each. And that was the problem.

9 PARTICIPANT: I mean that you're giving, you
10 know, when you're actually -- I know that has one
11 correct answer, but what I'm saying when you take the
12 test, there are four choices?

13 MR. AGUILAR: No. That was a problem that
14 we found in a couple of offices. They were giving a
15 multiple choice exam. So we want to make sure that
16 when the test is administered, it's administered in
17 the same way in every single office. So that when an
18 applicant goes in, he or she knows what to expect from
19 the interview, so they're not -- so now you'll know
20 what you're going to be asked and what the potential
21 answers are.

22 The other thing is, you know, we provide

1 suggested answers. We recognize that there may be
2 additional answers for questions. But for the purpose
3 of this test, we're asking applicants to provide one
4 of the suggested answers.

5 PARTICIPANT: And if they do -- I mean, for
6 example, on question 8, what did the Declaration of
7 Independence do? If you don't exactly say one of
8 those three things and you say, for example, it was
9 that the U.S. was breaking free from -- that will not
10 be considered an accurate answer?

11 MR. AGUILAR: You are going to have to
12 provide the suggested answer because there are
13 additional potential answers, just like in any civics
14 book or history book. If you look at the curriculum,
15 you cannot cover absolutely everything. So for the
16 purpose of this test, I mean, if you were to provide
17 all of the potential answers, you would have, you
18 know, a list of perhaps 50 potential answers. So for
19 the purpose of the test, you provide a suggested
20 answer. Why? Because our adjudicators know how to
21 administer the test, but they're not civics experts.
22 So if you -- you may provide a very intelligent,

1 sophisticated answer that may be valid, but the
2 adjudicator may not recognize. So for the purpose of
3 the test, stick to the suggested answers.

4 PARTICIPANT: Could you address the
5 technical aspects of the exam? Like will applicants
6 be asked to answer all 100?

7 MR. AGUILAR: No. No, no, no.

8 PARTICIPANT: When they read, are they
9 reading for five minutes? Just --

10 MR. AGUILAR: They have to study the 100
11 questions. So they will have to study everything, all
12 of the material. And that's the most important aspect
13 of this. They have to study. That's the requirement.
14 Study. The test is fairly easy. You are given ten
15 questions in your naturalization interview. If you
16 get six right, you pass. So, clearly, we're not out
17 here -- DR. GONZALEZ: Ten questions from the

18 hundred.

19 MR. AGUILAR: From the hundred, exactly.
20 Six, you pass. The reading and writing is based on --
21 we have changed that as well. We have -- they have to
22 read -- they are given three chances to read a

1 sentence in basic English.

2 We have developed a list of sentences that
3 are civic-focused, and that are the appropriate
4 language level. They have three chances to read
5 correctly a sentence. With the writing, it's the same
6 thing. They have three chances to write a sentence
7 that will be provided to them, which is civic-focused.

8

9 I would point out to -- and we will
10 distributed a brochure that we have just published
11 which covers the components of the test, and it shows
12 how the test is administered. The verbal, the oral
13 part of the test is still -- is going to be the same,
14 which is the interview with the adjudicator. You have
15 to go through your naturalization application and have
16 a conversation with the adjudicator. And the
17 adjudicator will test you're going to speak basic
18 English.

19 Our experience, you know, from decades of
20 doing this, and for focus groups that we've held
21 throughout the country, that those passing the English
22 and citizenship exam have studied and do have a basic

1 knowledge of English. We have to be very clear. The
2 law doesn't mandate people to speak English perfectly
3 well. It's the ability to communicate in English in
4 ordinary words. So it's basic knowledge of English,
5 that you can communicate, you can information, you can
6 communicate verbally, and you can read and write
7 basically. And we can say that all that today passed
8 the test can definitely speak basic English.

9 PARTICIPANT: How much would you say you
10 spent to do this? And if you add in, how much was
11 that cost for doing this test? And if add in the
12 attempt previously that didn't go so well, how much
13 was the total cost?

14 MR. AGUILAR: The total cost is \$6.5
15 million.

16 PARTICIPANT: That's with the previous
17 attempt?

18 MR. AGUILAR: Including the previous -- why
19 do you call it the previous attempt? I know that has
20 been called that, but it wasn't a previous attempt. I
21 think we really began the formal test development
22 process in April of '05. Four years before we had a

1 process of piloting different formats to get an idea
2 of the type of test that we could develop. We did
3 outreach with adult educators and immigrant-serving
4 organizations to have an open discussion about the
5 test, what type of things we could do. We had the
6 National Academy of Science provide input to us on how
7 we should go about test development.

8 So, but once we began the test development,
9 the Office of Citizenship in April '05, we have spent
10 \$2.5 million from test development, to piloting, to
11 the test. So it's \$4 million at that first phase, and
12 then the actual test development phase, \$2.5 million.

13 PARTICIPANT: Did you set a time period over
14 which you tested this?

15 MR. AGUILAR: The time was four months,
16 correct, Michael?

17 MR. JONES: Yes.

18 MR. AGUILAR: About four months, yes.

19 MR. JONES: The primary.

20 PARTICIPANT: I'm sorry. Just to clarify.
21 The 6.5 million is since April '05 or including --

22 MR. AGUILAR: No. 2.5 since April '05, or

1 6.5 since December of 2000.

2 PARTICIPANT: Okay. Thank you.

3 PARTICIPANT: Is there any way we can get a
4 list of the questions that you didn't include? That
5 you -- the 42 that were taken out?

6 MR. AGUILAR: Oh, yes. Yes.

7 PARTICIPANT: I have one question about the
8 questions. I notice that you ask like to name a
9 Native American tribe, but I don't actually see any
10 questions about Hispanic contributions to American
11 history. So I was wondering if you feel that's in any
12 way an oversight? Like you do ask who is MLK, but you
13 don't ask who is Caesar Chavez or something like that?

14 MR. AGUILAR: No. And there's a reason for
15 that. First of all, let me say that this is not a
16 treatise on American government, on American history.

17 It does not include every single aspect of U.S.
18 history. If it did, then we wouldn't have 100
19 questions. We would have at least 5,000 questions.

20 Secondly, we looked in history, which is the
21 more controversial part, we looked at -- we did a
22 literature review of standard history curriculums that

1 are being used in adult education sites. We also had
2 a panel of experts that advised us.

3 And we look at landmark moments of American
4 history that apply to every single citizen. For
5 example, MLK is not only an African American leader,
6 he's an American leader that spearheaded the civil
7 rights movement not only for African Americans but for
8 every single minority in the country.

9 So, indeed, there are important figures from
10 different ethnic groups that haven't been included, but
11 the purpose is not -- but we admit that we can't
12 include absolutely everything.

13 So we have looked at landmark moments and
14 individuals in history that have done things that
15 apply to every single American. We believe, and this
16 is part of our vision on integration and assimilation,
17 that there is a U.S. history; that every immigrant as
18 they become citizens has to see U.S. history not as
19 their history, but my history, with the good and the
20 bad. Because I think we acknowledge in the history
21 the negative periods of our history.

22 But that essential shared history, that

1 shared history leads to a sense of belonging, and it
2 has to be a history that applies to everyone
3 regardless of ethnicity, religious belief, of racial
4 identity.

5 And I think President Bush has been very
6 clear on this that, you know, our nation is not based
7 on race or ethnicity or culture or religion. It's
8 based on a shared sense of history, common civic
9 values, and a common language. As long as you speak
10 English and identify with our political system and our
11 history, then you're as American as anybody else.
12 Questions of ethnicity, race, religion are up to the
13 individual in a liberal democracy.

14 So that's why -- it's not, you know, as a
15 Hispanic, you know, I could say, well, why don't you
16 have -- originally from Puerto Rico -- why don't you
17 have questions about Puerto Rican history? Or why
18 don't you have questions about, you know, we -- again,
19 we just can't include every single -- mention every
20 single group. And secondly, we have to -- it has to
21 be just the landmark moments and facts and figures
22 that apply to every single American, regardless of

1 race.

2 PARTICIPANT: It seems like, though, that
3 the large population of who is taking the test is of
4 Hispanic descent, who may have a strong familiarity
5 with the contributions of Hispanics to this country.

6 You have things like the exploration of the
7 Spanish and the contributions they made, things like
8 the Texas history that apply to everybody, in fact our
9 President is from Texas. So there's Hispanic history
10 there.

11 So it seems like with the largest minority
12 population in the country, you kind of have an
13 oversight here. And the number of people who are
14 Hispanics who are going to become U.S. citizens.

15 MR. AGUILAR: No. No, it's, again, it's not
16 an oversight because we are not developing a test for
17 minority groups. We're not developing a test for
18 different ethnic groups. We're developing a test for
19 new Americans of all backgrounds, of all ethnicity, of
20 all religions, of all cultural backgrounds.

21 PARTICIPANT: So why do you ask them to name
22 a tribe of -- a Native American tribe then?

1 MR. AGUILAR: Well, because I think it's
2 fundamental to realize that when the settlers arrived
3 here, there were Native Americans that's already
4 settled the country. But, you know, if you go down
5 that path, I mean, I think every single -- you know,
6 we're going to start getting into a discussion of, you
7 know, why didn't you include this or that group, and
8 it would be test of 5,000 questions. And that's not
9 the purpose of the test.

10 Again, I must emphasize, it's not a treatise
11 on American history. There are fundamental aspects of
12 history that are not included in the test. We
13 recognize that. But there's no purposeful exclusion
14 of any group. And, again, I think we have to
15 emphasize what binds us together as Americans.

16 PARTICIPANT: Do you know what percentage of
17 people during the test period opted to take the pilot
18 instead of the new -- instead of the old test?

19 MR. JONES: Yes. I think it was about,
20 what, 40 percent?

21 MR. AGUILAR: Yeah, about that.

22 MR. JONES: Forty percent.

1 PARTICIPANT: On the study materials, are
2 you going to be releasing all of that on the web, or
3 are you going to have to --

4 MR. AGUILAR: Yes. No, we're going to have
5 it on the web, but we're also going to provide
6 material for free to applicants like we do right now.

7 For example, for the current exam, we have a document
8 called Learn About America Quick Civic Lessons, that
9 takes each question and answer and provides additional
10 information on each question and answer to encourage
11 additional civic learning and historical learning.
12 They are not tested on the additional information, but
13 that is distributed for free to every single
14 naturalization applicant. So we will do this.

15 Yes?

16 PARTICIPANT: If you were to fail twice,
17 what is the fee for applying to do it again?

18 MR. AGUILAR: Right now it's \$700 including
19 biometrics after the fee increase. Am I right?

20 MS. RADIGAN: Six seventy-five.

21 MR. AGUILAR: Six seventy-five. Six
22 seventy-five for biometrics?

1 MS. RADIGAN: Yes. Six hundred and seventy-
2 five dollars.

3 PARTICIPANT: You have to have your
4 biometrics taken again, you mean?

5 MR. AGUILAR: For naturalization, you have
6 to -- but you would have to -- there's a fee for the
7 process and then plus biometrics.

8 Yes?

9 PARTICIPANT: Even though now the new fees
10 are fully implemented, there are still efforts in
11 Congress and there's still a bill running around that
12 would try to reverse those fee increases, which
13 include of course the naturalization fee. Is there
14 any comment from the agency?

15 MR. AGUILAR: Well, you know, I can't
16 comment on that because really that's not in my area
17 of responsibility, but I must say something about this
18 test, that we -- the fee increase in no way had to do
19 with the citizenship exam or the administration of the
20 new exam, so there's no connection there. But, yeah,
21 I would leave that to Director Gonzalez to comment on.

22 MR. BENTLEY: And, Fernando, just to follow

1 up on that, I mean, it's a long-standing practice of
2 our agency is that we simply don't comment about
3 pending legislation that's up on the Hill, because if
4 we did that, we'd be commenting about pending
5 legislation all the time.

6 So certainly what Congress does, they have
7 the right to do. We administer our agency, the
8 policies based on the legislation that's passed,
9 signed into law by the President. So, our task, if
10 you will, is to faithfully administer immigration law
11 that's on the books now, not try to make plans for
12 what may be coming down the road.

13 PARTICIPANT: Chris, can I ask a question
14 about -- related to the increase?

15 MR. BENTLEY: Sure.

16 PARTICIPANT: Have you guys boosted staffing
17 to deal with the surge in applications before July
18 31st?

19 MR. BENTLEY: What we've been able to do is,
20 because of the resource modeling that we've done, is
21 allocate additional resources to work on that issue,
22 just as we would any issue.

1 We haven't had the chance to hire new
2 sources yet of employees, and the reason for that is,
3 there's a lag time between the fees taking effect and
4 us actually having those resources on hand to be able
5 to apply them to what we're doing. That's what we're
6 in the process of doing right now.

7 But in all reality, the fees just took
8 effect at the end of July. So we don't have that
9 money yet available to us to apply to the issue.
10 We've said many times -- just to finish up -- many
11 times that this next year is a transition year for the
12 agency, and that's part of it. It's the transition
13 from our old fee base and the limitations of those
14 fees, to our new fee structure and the additional
15 resources that will allow us to do more things.

16 MS. RHATIGAN: We're going to have two more
17 questions and we'd like to stay on the message about
18 today's announcement on the naturalization test and
19 not go off that on other topics, please. Thank you.

20 MR. AGUILAR: Thank you. You will also
21 receive, if you haven't already, a packet with the
22 stats from our pilot and additional information on the

1 test.

2 PARTICIPANT: The small group of elderly
3 immigrants that can take the test in another language,
4 how long do they have to be in the United States?

5 MR. AGUILAR: It's -- what is it, 65? Over
6 65 and 20 years of permanent residency? And then
7 what's the other? Can you say that again?

8 MR. HALE: 50/20 and 55/15.

9 MR. AGUILAR: Okay.

10 MS. RHATIGAN: And we -- actually, on the
11 chart if you'll look at it, you will see asterisks on
12 that little brochure that you receive. They've
13 already identified those questions, so you'll see it
14 in the chart that you have in your handout.

15 MR. BENTLEY: All right. Last question,
16 everyone.

17 MR. AGUILAR: Yes?

18 PARTICIPANT: The test -- the questions are
19 given orally. Is that right?

20 MR. AGUILAR: Yes. They are.

21 PARTICIPANT: And do you know how many
22 people are naturalized, on average, in recent years?

1 MR. AGUILAR: Well, I tell you, in the past
2 from '02 to '06 -- and this can be confirmed by going
3 to our website and checking our immigration statistics
4 -- but from '02 to '06, I think we're talking about
5 over 2.9 million new Americans. Until '05, we were
6 naturalizing about half a million. In '05, I think it
7 went up to 600,000. In '06, it went up to 700,000.
8 We're talking about record numbers of new citizens.
9 So that's why it's so important to strengthen these
10 efforts to make sure that people understand that
11 citizenship is not only benefit, but citizenship also
12 is an identity. So we want people obviously having
13 U.S. citizenship is a great benefit. It gives you
14 access to many social programs and many opportunities,
15 but we also want to make sure that people understand
16 the step that they're taking that it's also an
17 identity to become an American, and that you have to
18 identify with those three elements that I mentioned
19 earlier.

20 MR. BENTLEY: Alfonso, thank you very much.

21 (The press briefing concluded at 9:50 a.m.)

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