



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on January 13, 2012

## DHS Survey: Obama Administration Favors Immigration Over Security

According to the IG, the questions [examined](#) the agency's "FY 2011 performance measures, pressure to adjudicate cases, and overall impressions about the USCIS mission."



In 2010, Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) wrote a letter to the Inspector General (Todd Zinser), the USCIS Director (Alejandro Mayorkas), and the Secretary of Homeland Security (Janet Napolitano) expressing several concerns he had about the immigration benefit adjudication system. In requesting the report, Grassley asked the DHS to evaluate the following matters:

- The performance evaluation process for ISOs to determine what incentives exist to detect fraud;
- Whether pressure to process cases hinders national security and fraud detection;
- How employees view management efforts to promote process integrity; and
- Whether ISOs are encouraged to adjudicate benefit applications favorably without thorough review.

"When asked how well USCIS balances national security and promoting immigration, 130 of 252 respondents (51.6 percent) said that USCIS policy is too heavily weighted toward promoting immigration," read the January 2012 report, entitled, "The Effects of USCIS Adjudication Procedures and Policies on Fraud Detection by Immigration Services Officers."

The IG indicated that the more than 18,000 USCIS employees and contractors working for the agency are flooded with over six million applications every year, for benefits ranging from citizenship, employment authorization, and permanent residence to humanitarian relief. Moreover, despite a myriad of other responsibilities, ISOs are required to complete between 12 and 15 interviews per day in less than 30 minutes each, leaving "ample opportunities for critical information to be overlooked," the report cited.

Sixty-three, or 24.8 percent, of 254 USCIS officers said they have been asked or were pressured by their superiors to approve applications that should have been rejected. "Although fewer than one in four respondents had this concern, we view the number of pressured ISOs as a threat to the integrity of the benefit issuance system," the IG affirmed.

Officials "have been required to approve specific cases against their will," the report noted, and some admitted to pushing through paperwork "containing suspect information" to comply with supervisor demands.

The report suggests that because of the high volume of applications, and personnel shortages, the agency has struggled with valuing quality over quantity since at least the 1980s. But higher-up USCIS



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officials asserted that pressures were elevated in August 2009 after the Obama administration appointed Alejandro Mayorkas as Director during an effort to pass comprehensive immigration reform, bringing with him a mantra of “get to yes.”

In Sen. Grassley’s October 2010 letter, he accused Mayorkas of “fostering an environment that pressures employees to approve as many applications as possible” while encouraging “retaliation against those who dissent.” According to the DHS poll, Grassley’s allegations appear to hold at least some merit, as 90 percent of 251 respondents confirmed that they lacked sufficient time to conduct interviews of individuals applying for immigration benefits. In response to such pressure, 117 officers, or 46.6 percent, said the “length of time for interview should change.”

According to *The Daily*, which obtained internal communication documents before official release by the DHS, the new leadership “seemed to fundamentally clash with career agency employees over when to afford the benefit of the doubt, culminating in a whistle-blower investigation into a senior appointee and, ultimately, the agency-wide inspector general inquiry that produced the report.”

“We recognize their right to interpret things as liberally as possible, but you still have to follow the law,” stated one high-ranking official, who was troubled with the administration’s renewed agenda.

At least five veterans with the agency were either demoted, or given the choice between demotion or a relocation from Southern California to Nebraska and San Francisco, because they were “too tough” on individuals applying for immigration benefits, according to sources and letters obtained by *The Daily*.

In response to various employment threats, lower-level agency employees chose to adapt to the amended procedures, even if they didn’t agree with them. “People are afraid,” said one veteran manager. “Integrity only carries people so far because they’ve got to pay the rent.”

One rank-and-file officer said he was transitioned to working on less technical cases because he had a high denial rate. “They don’t reprimand you, they just move you,” he asserted. “They attempted to basically get me to come into line and approve a bunch of cases. And I just wouldn’t compromise myself because the approvals they ordered, they weren’t in line with the laws.”

The occurrences these sources have disclosed are reflected in the IG report, which in itself reflects on the competency of the new leadership that was established by the Obama administration. And the general reflection is that the White House has implemented a system that focuses more on quantity than quality — hence, the notion that it is more concerned with promoting immigration than improving national security.

“Whistleblowers have been complaining for several years that leadership in Washington, D.C. and immediate supervisors were placing inappropriate pressure on immigration adjudicators to simply find a way to approve benefits,” Grassley said in a January 6 statement, referring to the 90 percent of respondents who felt they were lacking time. “This comes down to the safety and security of the American people, which should not be compromised by any means.”



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