

INS managers bounced;
Visas for hijackers get bureaucrats reassigned

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Body

Washington --- The Immigration and Naturalization Service reassigned four managers Friday amid embarrassment over student visas issued to two of the Sept. 11 hijackers six months after their suicide attacks.

INS Commissioner James Ziglar blamed the blunder on a "breakdown in communication" that he said "is unacceptable and will not be allowed."

Also Friday, Attorney General John Ashcroft sent a letter to Congress asking for authority to fire INS employees who violate government policies.

"Today more than ever, we need to ensure that America's borders are secure and that proper enforcement actions are being taken against those unlawfully present in the United States," Ashcroft wrote.

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The employees removed Friday managed INS operations that have come under criticism: regional service centers, including the one that mailed out the visas to the hijackers; INS activities abroad as well as refugees and asylum seekers; daily operations throughout the agency; and INS inspection teams at ports of entry.

A Justice Department spokesman said the four career managers were being transferred, not fired. He said their replacements had been chosen earlier but that the job changes were speeded up because of this week's visa "debacle."

Student visas for hijackers Mohamed Atta and Marwan Al-Shehhi arrived Monday at Huffman Aviation, a Venice, Fla., flight school. Atta and Al-Shehhi, who had taken lessons at the school, flew on separate flights that crashed into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11.

That controversy was the latest of several to hit the INS, whose failure to enforce immigration law has been seen as aiding would-be terrorists.

The immigration agency also has come under fire for canceling adoptions of Cambodian infants after American couples had already picked up the children. The agency said it suspected the children had been part an illegal baby-selling operation.

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Last week, CBS's "60 Minutes" broadcast an accusation, denied by the **INS**, that some foreigners are being waved through the Miami airport immigration controls without having their names checked because of regular computer breakdowns.

Friday's action by **INS** Commissioner Ziglar drew a mixed response from law- makers.

Rep. Mark Foley (R-Fla.) praised the shake-up as a "strong first step."

"I know how difficult it is to even **reassign** a federal **bureaucrat**, and he should be commended for a tough job done well," Foley said.

But House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) said the reassignments were "entirely cosmetic" changes that would not fix the agency's "systemic" problems.

"Printing up different titles on business cards isn't going to solve a backlog of over 5 million cases of people who are attempting to receive documentation who are legal aliens **in** the United States and 314,000 illegal aliens --- who have had their day **in** court and have been ordered deported by a judge --- who are still **in** the country, and the **INS** doesn't have the faintest idea of where these people are." he declared.

"My patience has run out," said Sensenbrenner, who is leading an effort **in** Congress to break up the agency into two separate parts, one for immigrant service and the other for law enforcement.

The Bush administration is urging a less radical reform, which would keep both functions under a single commissioner.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, said the agency's problems go deeper than either its employees or structure.

The **INS** is suffering from "a legacy of mixed messages" from Congress and from administrations of both political parties about whether immigration laws should be enforced, said Krikorian, whose research group favors tighter restrictions.

"We have never really made it clear to the **INS** that we want the immigration laws to be enforced, period," he said.

Krikorian added that lawmakers who express outrage over the **visas**-for-terrorists blunder are like the police inspector **in** the movie "Casablanca" who said he was "shocked, shocked" to see gambling at Rick's cafe even as he collected his winnings.

ON THE WEB: Immigration and Naturalization Service: www.ins.gov

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