

# **INS CHIEF DISPUTES REPORTS OF IMPROPER NATURALIZATIONS**

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## **Body**

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No more than 1,300 immigrants may have become naturalized U.S. citizens improperly in the last year and even that number is "very preliminary," the nation's immigration chief said yesterday.

Doris Meissner, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, said reports that as many as 50,000 may be in that category were exaggerated. She said the INS is making a "thorough, manual review" of each case.

Republicans charge that citizenship cases were rushed through by the INS in an election-year push to grant citizenship to 1.2 million potential Democratic voters.

Meissner said that in the year ending Sept. 30, the INS deported 67,094 illegal immigrants, a record.

Meissner said the three-year total of deportations is 100,000 criminal immigrants, and 160,000 if noncriminal violations are counted.

Immigration has become a point of contention in the presidential election.

President Clinton boasts of beefing up the Border Patrol, increasing penalties and strengthening immigration requirements. Bob Dole is stressing, in California, the social and economic costs of immigration and said he would deny most social services to illegals.

The immigration agency also announced a change, as of last Thursday, that gives INS administrative authority to reopen and revoke naturalizations obtained by fraud or misrepresentation. Previously, only a court could take such actions.

An individual has 60 days to respond to a notice that the agency plans to reopen naturalization proceedings. An adverse decision can be appealed through the agency and the courts.

The FBI on Monday delivered 50,967 background files of people who were naturalized between August 1995 and September 1996 to a House subcommittee. The panel's staff was scouring them for convicted felons who do not qualify for citizenship; those convicted of lesser crimes who do qualify, and those who had been arrested on felony charges that have not yet been resolved.

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Meissner said those 50,000 records lack the final disposition of charges.

"Of the less than half of that 50,000, a very small fraction contain information which is criminal information, but which could possibly be the basis of an error. We will not know that until we go back to the aliens to see the disposition of the information."

She said that, to date, the **INS** staff has found only 1,300 cases that merit further investigation.

Meissner sent a letter yesterday to all 50 governors decrying "mischaracterizations" about newly **naturalized** citizens and called attention to the review of all cases where FBI fingerprint record information exists on the applicant.

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