

The cost of citizenship will increase on Friday

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Body

Effective **Friday**, the fee for filing a **citizenship** application is more than doubling to \$ 225 from \$ 95. The **increase** comes even as the Immigration and Naturalization Service struggles with large backlogs that have some applicants waiting more than two years for their paperwork to clear. In proposing the **increase** last year, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said it wouldn't take effect until her agency had made progress in reducing the backlog and speeding processing. Although the backlog remains at 1.8-million cases, near its record of 1.9-million, INS officials said they are making progress. The national average wait stood at 23 months as of December, down from the 27-month average at the start of 1998. Some immigrant advocates say the progress is not occurring fast enough. "There's certainly a lot of frustration in immigrant communities that services appear not to have gotten substantially better and the fee is going up dramatically," said Cecilia Munoz, vice president of the National Council of La Raza. The INS, which processed 1.6-million **citizenship** applications in 1997, saw the number of applications dip last year to 771,000, according to INS spokeswoman Elaine Komis. This year, the agency estimates 700,000 people **will** seek to become naturalized citizens. The surge in **citizenship** requests in 1996 and 1997 was driven in large measure by changes in federal law denying welfare and other benefits to non-citizens. "We think that we've pretty much hit the peak, but we never know," Komis said.

Compiled from Times WiresDC BRIEFSPeople seeking to beat the **citizenship** fee **increases** must act quickly. The INS must have received those applications in the mail by Thursday, Komis said. Clinton renominates Hormel as ambassador President Clinton has renominated James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg, and a White House official said Tuesday the administration hopes fairness **will** prevail in the new Congress so he can be approved. The Senate last year refused to vote on the nomination after several conservative Republicans accused Hormel of promoting homosexual views. The White House accused lawmakers of prejudice. Hormel, who is gay, was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., didn't allow his nomination to come to the floor in the face of scattered GOP objections. Barry Toiv, a White House spokesman, expressed confidence Hormel would be approved by the full Senate this year because a majority back the 66-year-old San Francisco philanthropist and heir to the Hormel Meat Co. Hubbell wants Starr's indictment dismissed Presidential friend Webster Hubbell is seeking dismissal of a new indictment by prosecutor Kenneth Starr, arguing that the case cannot be brought because of a 1994 deal prosecutors struck with him. The former associate attorney general is accused in a 15-count indictment of covering up his and Hillary Rodham Clinton's roles in the fraud-riddled Arkansas land development, Castle Grande. His attorneys said in court papers this week that six of the charges against him are invalid because of a 4-year-old plea agreement in which Hubbell admitted defrauding the Rose Law Firm - where Hubbell and Mrs. Clinton were partners - and its clients of at least \$ 394,000.

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