

IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL DENIES BEING RUSHED

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

March 5, 1997, Wednesday, FIVE STAR LIFT EDITION

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Section: NEWS, Pg. 08A

Length: 243 words

Byline: 1997,; Reuters News Service

Dateline: WASHINGTON

Body

The head of the **Immigration** and Naturalization Service **denied** Republican charges Tuesday that she came under White House pressure to speed up approval of citizenship applications before last November's elections.

But Commissioner Doris Meissner said members of Vice President Al Gore's staff did meet with her and other agency **officials** to suggest ways to improve procedures.

"Assistance was offered on ways to streamline the process," Meissner said at a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing.

Asked if the goal of the Citizenship USA program was to approve 1 million citizenship applications before the November elections, she replied, "No such goal was communicated to me."

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that the White House was under pressure from Hispanic groups to speed up citizenship approvals and turned to Gore's office to help eliminate the backlog. The **immigration** service did approve just over 1 million citizenship applications in the year before the elections, a record.

Subcommittee Chairman Hal Rogers, R-Ky., said he was upset because 71,000 immigrants were naturalized even though they had criminal records, and another 180,000 immigrants were granted citizenship without criminal background checks.

"The INS is out of control," Rogers told Meissner and Attorney General Janet Reno.

Reno said the Justice Department's inspector general was investigating the problem with the criminal background checks.

Classification

Language: English

Subject: CITIZENSHIP (93%); NATURALIZATION (90%); **IMMIGRATION** (89%); **IMMIGRATION** LAW (89%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (88%); ELECTIONS (87%); APPROVALS (87%); BACKGROUND CHECKS (87%); INVESTIGATIONS (86%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (73%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (71%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (68%); PUBLIC FINANCE (68%); APPROPRIATIONS (67%); PUBLIC **OFFICIALS** (67%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (65%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (61%)

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Company: GRAHAM HOLDINGS CO (57%); GRAHAM HOLDINGS CO (57%); US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%); US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%); US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%)

Ticker: GHC (NYSE) (57%)

Person: HAROLD ROGERS (52%); AL GORE (52%)

Geographic: KENTUCKY, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: March 5, 1997

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