

## **THOSE SEEKING U.S. CITIZENSHIP FACE LONGER WAIT SINCE 9-11**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

July 17, 2002 Wednesday Five Star Lift Edition

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**Section:** NEWS ; Pg. A7

**Length:** 443 words

**Byline:** Christopher Newton The Associated Press

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON

### **Body**

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The number of people seeking U.S. citizenship has soared since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. But the government is taking longer to approve applicants, as it seeks to weed out potential terrorists.

Numbers released Tuesday by the Immigration and Naturalization Service reflect an America changed by the events of Sept. 11.

Immigration officials reported 519,523 applications for citizenship in the eight-month period that ended May 31 - a jump of 65 percent over the same period a year before.

Even so, the number of people who got citizenship in the eight months - 337, 590 - dropped by 10 percent from the same period a year earlier.

In the days after the attacks, the government slowed the screening process because of fears of further terrorism, officials said.

At the same time, larger numbers of immigrants sought citizenship - partly to show patriotism and partly to avoid a federal dragnet that has detained thousands of immigrants on technicalities since Sept. 11.

The reasoning was spelled out by Ismat Bayumi, 37, of Dallas, who works with people seeking citizenship through the Catholic Charities. He said, "People are eager to apply for naturalization because of the problems they run into, or they have a friend who had a problem with INS."

Bayumi arrived in the United States in 1996, seeking asylum from Sudan, and became a citizen May 23. He had applied for citizenship in November, as soon as he had lived legally inside the United States for five years, as required.

Lisa Gonzales admits that she came to Houston illegally 12 years ago. Even so, she applied for citizenship on Sept. 13.

"On Sept. 11, I felt as American as anyone ever has," Gonzales said. "This is my war, too."

Justice Department officials cite both the increase in applications and a post-Sept. 11 directive urging greater caution in the approval process.

Los Angeles INS official Francisco Arcaute says that since Sept. 11, he has been moved as he watched men and women grasp their citizenship certificates.

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He said, "These people become the best Americans, because they've had to sacrifice their homeland, and they didn't just inherit **U.S. citizenship.**"

Backlogs for naturalization applications once stretched as **long** as two years. The INS began making headway during President Bill Clinton's administration. President George W. Bush has pushed to reduce it to six months.

Luis Gutierrez of Latinos Progresando in Chicago said patriotism had motivated many of those **seeking citizenship since** Sept. 11. He said, "People wanted to show their pride in this country. I think some people also are scared they may be losing some of their rights."

## Notes

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NATIONAL FOCUS

## Graphic

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PHOTO, GRAPHIC; (1) Photo by ODELL MITCHELL JR./POST-DISPATCH - This certificate of **U.S. citizenship** was given to Erika Hartley of Glen Carbon, a native of Germany, after she took the oath of allegiance in March. GRAPHIC GRAPHICS; (2) Graphic / Bar Chart by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS - More applications, fewer approvals; Applications for **U.S. citizenship** rose during the first eight months of this fiscal year compared with 2001. But the number of people awarded **citizenship** dropped.; Oct-May FY 2001 - Applications for naturalization - 314,971; Oct-May FY 2001 - People awarded **citizenship** - 377,014; Oct-May FY 2002 - Applications for naturalization - 519,523; Oct-May FY 2002 - People awarded **citizenship** - 337,590; Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

## Classification

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**Language:** English

**Subject:** **CITIZENSHIP** (95%); NATURALIZATION (89%); IMMIGRATION (89%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (89%); TERRORISM (88%); **CITIZENSHIP** LAW (88%); TERRORIST ATTACKS (73%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (73%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (73%); APPROVALS (72%); IMMIGRATION LAW (72%); POLITICAL DETAINEES (68%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (67%); CHARITIES (62%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (60%); CATHOLICS & CATHOLICISM (50%); RELIGION (50%)

**Company:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

**Organization:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

**Geographic:** UNITED STATES (94%)

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**Load-Date:** July 17, 2002

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