

Message to all INS employees

Last year, when President Bush nominated me to serve as Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, one of the major goals he gave me was to restructure the INS. Notwithstanding the events of the past year, we have pursued that objective vigorously and, I believe, made substantial progress. It is clear, however, that the events of September 11th and the subsequent announcement of the proposed creation of a Department of Homeland Security have fundamentally changed the context of that objective.

Last year's terrorist attacks demonstrated not only that the President was correct in directing an INS restructuring, but that the entire way we address border security needs to be redesigned. In dealing with the reality of international terrorism, the President has proposed the establishment of a Department of Homeland Security. From my experience as INS Commissioner, I clearly understand the need for this department with its promise of unification, synchronization and coordination of our efforts to protect ourselves from terrorism. I support the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and I am confident that legislation establishing such a department will be enacted in a format similar to that proposed by the President.

The new department will bring a new prominence and budget priority to "border security" in its many manifestations. This new prominence will be good both for the nation and for the men and women of the INS who serve as America's guardians of the border. As I talk to INS employees around the country, I am heartened by how they look forward to becoming part of this new department and undertaking the larger responsibility that it will entail. There is understandable concern about what this change will mean for individual employees and their families, but I believe that there are far more positives than negatives for each of you.

Restructuring will now be achieved through the merger of the INS into the new department, and border security will now receive the priority status it deserves. Knowing these goals will be successfully accomplished as part of a larger and stronger agency, it is an appropriate time for me to return to private life. Last month, I informally advised the President and the Attorney General of my intention to retire from federal service and return to private life. Yesterday, I sent the President a letter formalizing my decision.

At the request of the White House, I have not set a specific date for my departure. Assuming that the legislative process continues on its projected schedule, I presently contemplate staying on through the passage of the homeland security bill, and for a reasonable period thereafter to assist with the merger of the INS into the new department. I anticipate that I will be leaving sometime in the fall. However, I have set December 31, 2002 as the outside date for my departure.

I have been blessed to serve our country on various occasions in all three branches of government dating back to 1964. I am particularly thankful for having been given the

opportunity to lead the INS during this critical and historic period and I am grateful for the trust that the President has reposed in me. I am also grateful for having had a forum to articulate my views on the importance of standing fast for the principles that have made our country great. We must never bow to evil forces that exhibit a single-minded determination to undermine our resolve to protect those principles and thereby cause us to abandon our heritage as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

However, above all, I am most proud to have been able to serve with the men and women of the INS. Few outside of the Service understand, or are willing to acknowledge, the incredible job you do each and every day. Each year you touch every one of the over half a billion people who enter this country legally. Each year you remove well in excess of one million people who have attempted to enter illegally or who have broken our immigration laws. While doing this, you also process immigration petitions for over 8 million non-citizens who want to be a part of this great nation, and the promise it represents to the rest of the world. It truly has been a privilege to be one of you, and I will treasure that experience always.

As the INS enters a new period in its history, I know it will continue to serve the American people with the same dedication it has in the past. When I leave, I will leave with every confidence that America will continue to be well served by the men and women of the INS.

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