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## Immigration delays unacceptable

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The federal agency that processes visa and naturalization applications should not have been surprised—or unprepared—for the huge increase in applications it received this year.

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The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) received 2.5 million applications during last summer alone, as reported by the New York Times. This year, the number of naturalization petitions submitted just about doubled from 2006.

Now, there is a backlog of applications, with USCIS representatives reportedly saying that it could take more than a year to decide many recent applications.

Yet, it was the agency's staggering fee hikes that prompted the huge increase. For example, the "green card" application fee for adults jumped from \$395 to \$1,050.

The hikes were announced in January and went into effect on July 30, so there was a rush to submit applications before then.

The flood of applications was also propelled by the Ya es Hora campaign, a national drive to help immigrants submit their naturalization petitions. Many of those applications came from Hispanics.

Left with no choice, immigrants have been forced to pay exorbitant fees. In an anti-immigrant climate, they have used the channels available to adjust their status and pursue the right to exercise their civic duties as citizens. Indeed, some applicants were motivated by the opportunity to vote in the upcoming presidential elections.

Immigrants continue to foot the bills of USCIS. The agency should be delivering, not delaying, on what it said triggered the fee hikes—a need to improve services.

The House Judiciary subcommittee on immigration, on which Congressman Anthony Weiner sits, should closely monitor USCIS's performance.

Note: Applications for the Diversity Visa Lottery are due at noon on December 2.

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