

## **2007-2008 IMMIGRATION UPDATE 4**

February 1, 2008

### **PROCESS OF ACHIEVING CITIZENSHIP SLOWS**

At least in part due to the larger than normal number of immigrants applying for naturalization, the process of gaining U.S. citizenship has slowed. In 2007, more than 1.4 million immigrants—including nearly 11,000 in Denver alone—sought to become citizens. These numbers are double those for 2006, although the actual number of new citizens approved nationally decreased slightly from 2006 to 2007 (numbers for Denver increased slightly). Many attribute the increase in applications to efforts by labor unions and community groups to promote citizenship; others say that the attention to immigration in the news has motivated immigrants to become more fully engaged in their new country—they want to have a voice in resolving such issues.

Traditionally, the process of becoming a citizen, once the residency requirement had been met, was about six months. Currently, the process requires 16 to 18 months, and there is a backlog of nearly 1 million cases. A July 1, 2007, increase in the application fee, from \$475 to \$675, has provided funds to hire additional staff, but the first of those new “adjudicators” are only now entering training.

The unions who have been encouraging immigrants to apply for naturalization are questioning the delays, especially in light of the higher application fees now required. Eliseo Medina, an official with the Service Employees International Union, describes the situation as “absolutely ridiculous” and hopes that the delays are not related to “politics.” Maria Elena Garcia-Upson, an official with the Immigration Service, says the delays are due only to the increased number of applicants.

Source: *Denver Post*, January 13, 2008, [http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci\\_7956166](http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_7956166)

### **PEW HISPANIC CENTER PROFILES LATINO VOTERS**

The Pew Hispanic Center has released a series of fact sheets profiling Latino voters in eight “Super Tuesday” states with “relatively high” concentrations of Hispanic voters: Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York. (See <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=40>.)

According to the Colorado fact sheet, of the 404,000 eligible Hispanic voters in Colorado, 89 percent are native-born citizens—higher than the national figure of 74 percent. The fact sheet provides a number of comparisons between Latino and all voters in Colorado. For example, Latino voters are somewhat younger than all voters in Colorado. Among all voters, approximately half are age 44 or under; for Latino voters, that percentage is over 60 percent.

## **NEW ARIZONA LAW GOES INTO EFFECT**

In Arizona, a new law went into effect January 1. The law targets employers who knowingly hire unauthorized migrants; those prosecuted under the new law could lose their licenses and be forced out of business. The law requires county attorneys to investigate any complain deemed not frivolous. Although a federal judge has ruled no prosecutions can occur before March, a report on Yahoo News indicates that effects have already been seen in layoffs, school absenteeism, and flight of unauthorized migrants from the southwestern state—a phenomenon dubbed “Hispanic Panic.” (See [http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080126/ts\\_afp/usimmigrationeconomyarizona\\_080126084000;\\_ylt=Ak64EKU07KPCIWA7iXbM3axQuk0A](http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080126/ts_afp/usimmigrationeconomyarizona_080126084000;_ylt=Ak64EKU07KPCIWA7iXbM3axQuk0A).)

Conservative columnist Linda Chavez, in contrast, suggests there have been few complaints regarding employers; to explain why this might be true, she cites a study by the America’s Majority Foundation. According to this study, “States with the highest percentage of immigrants or the largest recent influx of immigrants – 19 ‘high immigrant jurisdictions’ in all – are wealthier and have better employment numbers, and most boast better crime figures than those with fewer immigrants.” Thus, Chavez reasons, Arizona has seen few complaints because immigrants are helping the economy. (See [http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/viewpoints/stories/DN-chavez\\_14edi.ART.State.Edition1.3743986.html](http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/viewpoints/stories/DN-chavez_14edi.ART.State.Edition1.3743986.html).)

## **U.S DESERTERS POSE IMMIGRATION PROBLEM FOR CANADA**

Approximately 150 members of the U.S. military who have deserted in order to avoid being deployed to Iraq (some for the second or third time) and their families are currently living in Canada. The deserters have sought to win classification as refugees, which would allow them to stay in Canada permanently. The deserters argue that the war in Iraq is illegal, an argument they believe is buttressed by the Canadian government’s refusal to take part in the campaign. To date, however, the courts and immigration officials have ruled against the deserters. The Immigration Minister could still issue an order granting refugee status.

The deserters currently in Canada number far fewer than during the Vietnam era, when 50,000 draft evaders and deserters headed across the border; perhaps as many as 25,000 stayed in Canada permanently. Many of these individuals have come forward to support the contemporary deserters, even helping them find their way across the border. Attorney Jeffrey House, himself a Vietnam era draft evader, has represented several of the deserters. “The United States is supposed to comply with treaty obligations like the U.N. charter, but they don’t,” says House. “When the president isn’t complying with the Geneva Accords or with the U.N. charter, are we saying, ‘Only the soldier who signed up when he was 17 -- that guy has to strictly comply with contract? The president, he doesn’t have to?’ I don’t think so. I don’t think that is fair.” (Source: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/12/06/60II/main659336.shtml>)

If the current group of deserters return to the United States, they face time in a military prison, reintegration into the military, and/or dishonorable discharge.

### **PBS NEWSHOUR FEATURES IMMIGRATION IN COLORADO**

While disagreeing about whether unauthorized immigrants help or harm Colorado's economy, should be given a pathway to citizenship or returned to their home countries, commit a disproportionate number of crimes or are treated as slave labor, six Coloradans interviewed by a PBS *NewsHour* reporter a week before the 2008 political caucuses agreed that they were frustrated by the federal government's failure to act and the presidential candidates' lack of attention to the issue of immigration. While Colorado pollster Floyd Cirulli found that immigration is the issue of most importance to 25 percent of Coloradans and perceptions about politicians' views on immigration have already impacted on race in the state—the 2007 mayoral election in Greeley. The interviewees, however, felt that the candidates were not addressing the issue adequately, perhaps because they are trying to court the Latino vote while simultaneously not offending conservatives. To read a transcript or watch streaming video of the segment on Colorado, see [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june08/colorado\\_01-30.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june08/colorado_01-30.html).