



Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE GRIFFIN B. BELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT THE

DEDICATION CEREMONY

OF

INS' NEW COMPUTER SYSTEM

10:00 a.m.
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 1979
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Distinguished guests and members of the press,
Commissioner Castillo, Deputy Commissioner Noto,

I thank all of you for coming to the district office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service here in Washington. I have asked all of you to join me here, because INS is one of the least visible government agencies, and certainly a district office is even more inconspicuous.

For those reasons, I hope both Congress and the American people will focus more attention on INS and its dual functions. INS has been the poor cousin of federal agencies, booted from department to department until it finally landed in the Justice Department in 1940. It has often been subjected to Congressional complaints and public criticism.

Over the last few months, I have been studying INS more closely and working with Commissioner Castillo on its most pressing needs. To understand those needs, we first must understand the dual nature of the INS mission: it provides a public service in terms of its immigration and naturalization functions, but it is also a law enforcement agency, guarding our borders against illegal entry. Both aspects are vital to the public interest, and both require appropriate Congressional support.

Let me try to put those INS functions into historical perspective. Increasingly over the last few years, the American public has heard about the problem of illegal immigration. In much of the press coverage of that situation, it has been assumed that that meant, in particular, Mexican nationals slipping over our long, common border. No doubt that is a problem. But I have come to believe that perhaps as many illegal aliens are in the United States from a wholly different source: visitors and foreign students who enter legally, with visas, but who deliberately overstay and then disappear into the vastness of the country.

At present, using our manual system of paper retrieval, it is at least six months before arrival and departure documents can be matched and compared in INS' Washington headquarters office. At that point, if the data show the individual did not leave as required by the terms of his or her visa, the trail is long and cold. The amount of investigative time that would be required then to locate and apprehend these "overstays" is simply beyond the INS. Thus, coping with the paperwork is essential to effective law enforcement and public service by INS.

That is why I have asked you here today to join me in a ceremony that marks a turning point in the history of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Within and without the Service, notably from such knowledgeable individuals as Commissioner Castillo, Senator DeConcini of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Congresswoman Holtzman of the House Judiciary Committee, there was a growing realization that INS was still working with a system for processing aliens that may have been appropriate for the day of steamship lines and minimal international travel. But today the INS handles 6.5 million visitors each year, as well as 800,000 business travelers, 187,000 foreign students, a half million "regular" immigrants, and another 125,000 refugees. No manually based system could possibly cope with these kinds of numbers, either in terms of public service or law enforcement.

Accordingly, we are now seeking to implement a two-part automation program at INS. The first part is to complete automation of data retrieval in what is known as the Nonimmigrant Document Control System. NIDC contains all the vital data for aliens temporarily in this country -- foreign students, business travelers, and visitors for pleasure. This system first caught my attention in January, when I discovered that, because of the paperwork backlog, INS could not tell me the total number of foreign students studying in this country. When this part of the automation program is finished, we will be able to retrieve the data on individuals much more quickly and produce the summary kinds of tabulations that I had asked for in January.

According to figures given to me by Commissioner Castillo, it will cost about \$600,000 to bring the current paperwork up to date in the NIDC system so that it can be automatically retrievable. Our target is the end of this fiscal year, September 30. Then it will require another \$1.25 million in Fiscal 1980 to keep this system up to date, simply because we anticipate more than 10 million visitors and students coming to the United States during that period.

I should add that INS is planning for full automation of the NIDC system. Our intention is to ensure that the INS data base is constantly up to date, enabling INS to dedicate its resources to more effective law enforcement by quicker and more accurate identification of illegal "overstays," whom we will then quickly move to apprehend and deport, according to the law. Eventually, we hope to eliminate the current system of paper form I-94s, which now are sent by the millions to Washington headquarters of INS and which have literally buried its staff for several years.

What we are unveiling here in Washington today is the second aspect of the INS automation program. Most public and Congressional complaints about INS stem from its inability to cope with volumes of alien files, which, by law, it must maintain for immigration and naturalization purposes. In the 57 so-called "file control offices"

around the country, the INS now has to maintain, locate, and update 17 million separate records on tourists, business travelers, foreign students, permanent resident aliens, and those in the process of naturalization. In this Washington district office alone, there are some 515,000 files. The staff of INS has simply been unable to keep up with this ever-rising tide of paper, and it used to be common in file control offices that an individual's file could be accidentally misplaced under the manual system, causing much grief and anxiety for both the Service and the affected individual.

The system I am about to turn on here represents a pioneering effort to cut through all that by the imaginative use of minicomputers. These minicomputers will keep track of the precise location of individual files and will monitor the status of various petitions and cases, produce form letters to keep the alien apprised of his or her case status, and even generate receipts for money received for various filing fees. The computers will also produce summary reports on caseload, fees received, average processing time, and other similar data. All this will cut down dramatically on the frustrating INS delays in dealing with the public.

This modern approach to decentralized data processing was first introduced last year in the Houston,

Texas, district office for prototype testing. The "bugs" were worked out there. INS then installed the system in the Boston district office. This Washington installation is the third of four such automation projects scheduled to go on line in Fiscal 1979.

With support of the Office of Management and Budget and with personal assurances from President Carter, who is very much interested in improving both the service and law enforcement roles of INS, we will be seeking another \$3.14 million from Congress in Fiscal 1980 to install the system in another 19 file control offices around the country. These 23 offices account for 91% of the adjudications workload of the entire Service. We believe this program will ensure that the American taxpayer is getting the best possible service for the tax dollars invested.

These proposals have been independently evaluated by the management staff at the Justice Department and by my own staff, as well as by OMB. We are all fully satisfied that we have found at least a partial answer to the vast problems facing the Service. For that, I am grateful to Commissioner Castillo and to Deputy Commissioner Noto for their progressive vision in modernizing the INS. These are two strong leaders, and I am glad they are working so hard to improve this agency.