

Less Than Meets the Eye at INS

A Review of the 1994 INS Strategic Plan by James H. Walsh

Considering the widespread charges of bureaucratic incompetency at INS, this strategic plan could have been the blueprint for reform called for by INS Commissioner Doris Meissner in her introduction. It could have addressed concrete ways to correct agency inadequacies and curb the current onslaught of illegal aliens. It could have, but it doesn't. The focus instead is on a commitment to cultural diversity in the INS workforce "at all levels and occupations." This strategy simply parrots the Clinton Administration's practice of weighting biographical data over qualifications and experience.

Toward INS 2000 is a slick publication that brings to mind the maxim: to change and to improve are two different things. For example, in the midst of preparing the Strategic Plan, INS political appointees promised to address the incompetency charge with a reorganization of managers. The result, however, has been a reshuffling of titles with no improvement in the quality of service.

Initiated in 1993, the INS Strategic Plan was ready for testing by the summer of 1994 when flotillas of Cuban and Haitian boatpeople filled the Caribbean intent on Florida shores. The White House, however, assigned crisis management to the National Security Council and the State Department, leaving the INS with its goal of immigration crisis management still unmet.

The INS Strategic Plan is a rehash of ideas that have been floated around the agency for at least a decade, such as recognizing "the importance of immigration data." In other words the INS cannot say precisely how many illegal aliens are in the United States. As a remedy the reinvented INS suggests "technology to manage detention space and track detained migrants." It is a disturbing thought that the INS would detain migrants, many of whom are in this country legally. What the authors must have meant is the tracking of detained illegal aliens, persons who are present in this country in violation of U.S. immigration law. The INS would be well-advised to maintain the distinction between migrants and illegal aliens; the two are not the same. A far more disturbing thought is that any government agency would have trouble tracking those in its custody.

To stop unlawful migration, the INS promises to breathe new life into the corpse of employer sanctions by means of "an automated verification system" — in

other words, the controversial federal identification registry or national ID card. Although favored by the chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and the chair of the Congressional Commission on Immigration Reform, national ID cards are opposed by civil libertarians and immigration advocates.

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TOWARD INS 2000: ACCEPTING
THE CHALLENGE
An INS Strategic Plan
by the Immigration and
Naturalization Service
Office of Policy and Planning
Washington, DC: INS, 1994,
paperback, 32 pages.

The Strategic Plan's objective of "ensuring border integrity" has been a clarion call since 1980, but an ephemeral one. For example, the new Border Patrol agents hired by INS in 1994 have yet to reduce the numbers of illegal aliens

crashing U.S. borders. At Nogales, Arizona, the 75 overworked Border Patrol agents who made 17,000 arrests of illegal aliens this past February and March admit that "many many more illegals" escaped apprehension. With the burn-out and attrition rate of experienced agents exceeding the hiring rate of new men and women, the INS remains in a catch-up mode.

The Strategic Plan rightly calls for employee accountability. A lack of accountability and responsibility defines the INS management. At times, regulations and field instructions change daily and chaos reigns in INS Headquarters. Even General Accounting Office (GAO) audits, critical of the agency, have had no impact on INS management or Congressional oversight inquiries. The Strategic Plan, however, hopes to achieve accountability through politically correct employee councils designed to achieve accountability through empowerment. Their effectiveness remains to be seen.

On the issue of resource management, the Plan gets an "A" for chutzpah. Financial mismanagement at INS has been documented by the GAO, the Department of Justice itself, and the news media, as recently as September 1994; yet the Administration rewarded with bonuses the very bureaucrats in charge of INS finances.

The persistent INS malaise can be traced to the lack of a clear immigration policy. Until Congress clarifies existing immigration laws and requires the INS to enforce them, glossy publications like *Toward INS 2000*

will not provide an effective strategy. Without consistent presidential direction and congressional oversight, a strategic plan will not cure the deep-rooted morale, competency, and management problems at INS. Commissioner Meissner is right when she recognizes the need of a blueprint for reform. Her strategic plan, however, with its excess white space and banal generalities, is not that much-needed blueprint but an exercise in bureaucratic myopia. ■