

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

March 12, 2009

Secretary Janet Napolitano
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

We are writing to urge that the Department of Homeland Security issue a new regulation to reduce the fees associated with applying for citizenship in the United States. As a nation, we should strive to ensure that immigrants become full members of our nation and participate in our democracy as U.S. citizens. The Bush Administration's decision to raise citizenship fees has violated that principle and thwarted the dreams of U.S. citizenship for many immigrants by making the cost prohibitive.

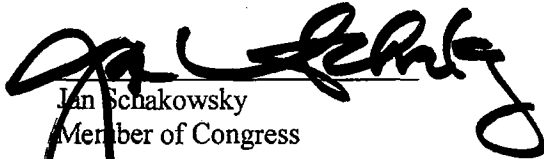
When President Bush took office, the fees for a naturalization application totaled \$260. Fees increased several times since then. Most recently, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) hiked the application costs in July 2007 from \$400 to \$675—an increase of 70 percent. As a result, an immigrant working a minimum wage job would have to save her entire pre-tax earnings for nearly three weeks to afford this new charge.

Increasing the naturalization fee has devastated citizenship application rates. Prior to the most recent increase, demand for citizenship had been at historic highs. More than 1.46 million legal immigrants filed naturalization applications from August 2006 through July 2007, most of whom became citizens in time to vote in the historic 2008 elections. Since July 2007, however, application numbers have collapsed; in the twelve months since the fee increase took effect, only 480,000 applications were filed. Particularly hard hit by the fee hike are the elderly, the disabled, the working poor, single mothers, students, and other immigrants with low or fixed incomes. The current economic downturn and job layoffs are making it that much more difficult for these immigrants to save for their citizenship applications.

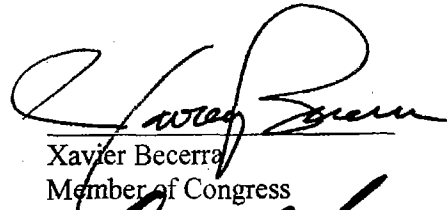
Rather than place barriers to citizenship, we urge the Obama Administration to implement policies that encourage it. Lowering naturalization fees would be a tremendous benefit to all Americans because by making citizenship more accessible, more immigrants would participate fully in our society. We believe that the current fee is prohibitive and should be lowered to the pre-July 2007 amount of \$400. However, we are happy to discuss other alternatives with you, such as a temporary rollback in the fee to the pre-July 2007 level while undergoing a comprehensive review of the application process to determine the appropriate fee amount.

We look forward to hearing from you and working with the Obama Administration on this and other critical immigrant policies, including comprehensive reform.

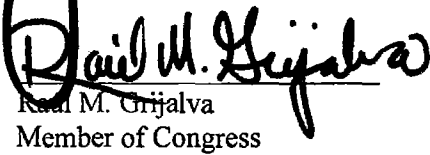
Sincerely,



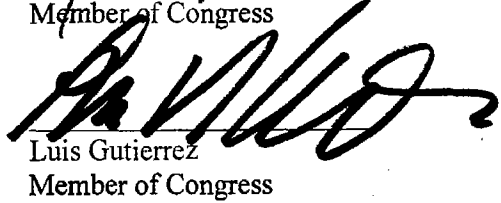
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



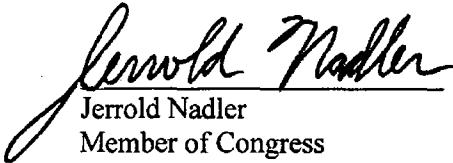
Xavier Becerra
Member of Congress



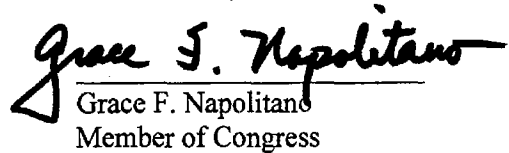
Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



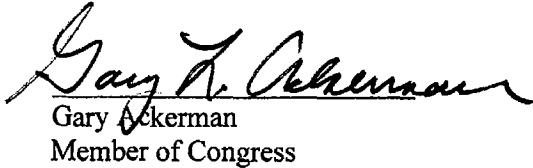
Luis Gutierrez
Member of Congress



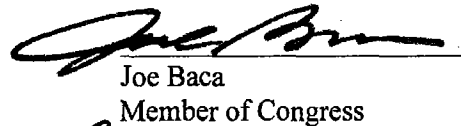
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



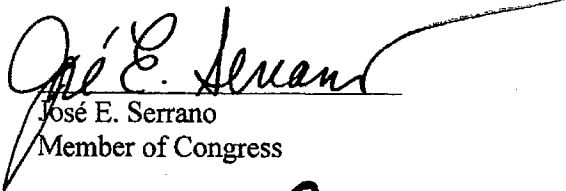
Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



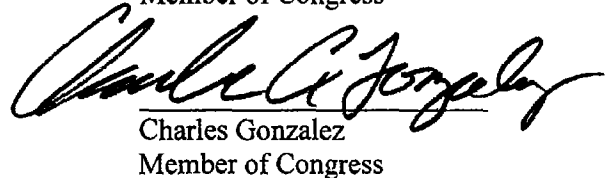
Gary Ackerman
Member of Congress



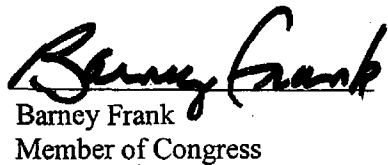
Joe Baca
Member of Congress



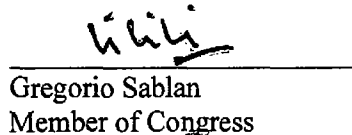
José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



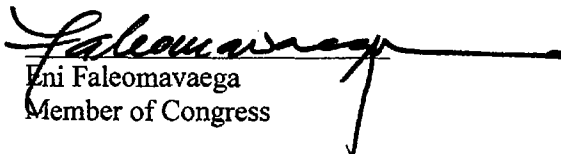
Charles Gonzalez
Member of Congress



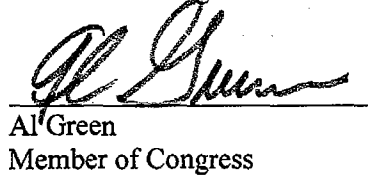
Barney Frank
Member of Congress



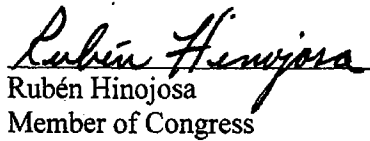
Gregorio Sablan
Member of Congress



Eni Faleomavaega
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress



Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress