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Ur Jaddou becomes first woman to head USCIS

Lubna Kalby

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The US Senate has confirmed the nomination of Ur Mendoza Jaddou as Director of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). She is the first woman to head the immigration agency of the US government.

In April, US President Joe Biden had announced his intention to nominate her for this leadership post. The Senate, on Friday, confirmed her appointment by a vote of 47-34.

According to a biography provided by the White House, she is a daughter of immigrants, a mother from Mexico and a father from Iraq. She was born and raised in California and holds a masters' degree from Stanford and a law degree from UCLA School of Law. She has two decades of experience in immigration law, policy and administration, which includes an earlier stint with the USCIS. Previously, Jaddou was the Chief Counsel for US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from June 2014 to January 2017.

USCIS officials process and adjudicate visas, including H-1B visas which are a popular work visa for Indians especially from the technology sector; they process and issue employment authorisation documents (EAD), approve green card and citizenship applications, to name a few functions. Lately, the USCIS has come in for a lot of flak for slow processing of various visa and H-4 EAD applications.

At her nomination hearing, before the Senate Judiciary Committee she had mentioned her objectives, if selected, "At the heart of a functioning immigration system is an agency that effectively processes immigration and naturalization applications under the law, like those of my family and so many others. This means that USCIS must process applications fairly, efficiently, and in a humane manner; be accessible, transparent and accountable; and safeguard the integrity of the system and ensure the security of the nation."

Referring to the financial crisis that USCIS is facing, she had added, “My most immediate responsibilities if confirmed, will be to return the agency to firm solvency, resolve dramatically increasing processing times and backlogs and utilize 21st century tools.”

The expectations from her among the Indian diaspora run high, including taking steps to ensure that the 100,000 employment based green cards are not wasted, but are allotted in time. David Bier, research fellow at the CATO Institute had pointed out that if these employment based slots are not used by September 30 (which is the end of the fiscal year), these will be lost forever.

In his official statement, Alejandro N. Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security, states,

"It is my honor to congratulate Ur Mendoza Jaddou on her confirmation as Director of USCIS. Ur has two decades of experience in immigration law, policy, and administration. She will administer our Nation's immigration system fairly and justly. As the daughter of hard-working immigrants, Ur understands how immigrant families enrich our country and the challenges they face. I want to thank the United States Senate for confirming Ur. I look forward to working closely with her to rebuild and restore trust in our immigration system."