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Immigration Faces Shortfall

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The new director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said Thursday declining revenues at the agency might mean higher application fees at the agency.

Alejandro Mayorkas, who was sworn in as the agency's director last month, said during a news conference in Albuquerque that the number of applications it has received for services - which include issuing green cards and non-immigrant worker documents - is down significantly from previous years.

He said the agency's options to make up the difference include getting more money from Congress, making cuts in the agency and raising fees. It has asked Congress for help in plugging a \$118 million budget shortfall.

"The potential fee increase is not something that is taken lightly. We understand very well its impact upon the community. In my personal view, it would be something of last resort," Mayorkas said. "We are committed to maintaining our service levels and, in fact, hopefully improving them."

Elizabeth Lee, field office director of the agency's Albuquerque office, said in spite of the budget shortfall the same level of service should be available here.

Mayorkas said his goals are to improve the agency's consistency, efficiency and transparency. He pointed out that the agency earlier this month introduced its new bilingual Web site, available in both English and Spanish.

He was in Albuquerque to discuss immigration with immigrant organizations, law enforcement, business owners and local elected officials.