Letters to the Editor

NSA Policy on Contact with Foreign Nationals

I read with interest the article by Ezra Brown on working at the National Security Agency. It sounded exciting. However, NSA will not hire Chicano mathematicians like myself. Somehow, because I have Mexican aunts and uncles living along the border in Mexico, I apparently am a security risk. Before applying for a summer position at NSA in the mid-80s, I had worked at Sandia Laboratories for two years in the '70s, where I had held a security clearance. When I went through the interviewing process at NSA, I was told that NSA employees should not have contact with foreign nationals and I was asked if I would comply with their regulations. I said that I still had cousins in Mexico who regularly came to Tucson and that I usually saw them, though I and my immediate relatives were all U.S. citizens. I certainly couldn't believe that NSA would expect me to turn my back on these relatives when they came for a visit. The interviewer would not answer my repeated requests for a clarification of this; she just kept on repeating the question, was I willing to comply with the regulations of NSA. After a half hour of this I stated that I could not comply, and I was not offered a summer position.

The Chicano population living in the Southwest pays its taxes and through these taxes supports the activities of this government and its agencies. Yet, government agencies like NSA can create discriminatory policies, in the interest of national security, that keep us from participating in their activities. It is time to put an end to the institutionalized discriminatory practices of this federal agency. NSA must rethink those rules that serve to keep out the Chicano population from their workforce.

In the past, the membership of the AMS has always responded to human rights issues from around the world. I would expect this same concern on an issue that impacts on our own citizenry.

William Yslas Velez
University of Arizona

(Received August 25, 1994)

Electronic Discussion of Issues by Candidates

This is in regard to the turnout in the AMS elections. There has been concern expressed about the low portion of people who vote. Let me say why I personally did not. I did not have the information to make an informed choice about whom I want to represent me. This is because such details as what papers a person has published (many of which I cannot read, since they are not in areas that I am familiar with) are far less important than things like where the candidates stand on important issues. Thus, from my point of view, practically the only relevant information that I have is the rather general personal statement of under 200 words.

Therefore, at present what I have is a choice between an uninformed vote and no vote. From my perspective the only difference between the two is a small amount of effort followed by the cost of a postage stamp. Therefore, I saved myself a little bother and did not vote. And from some informal interactions I know that I am not alone.

One possible solution is for the candidates to engage in a public discussion on the issues. Obviously it is impossible for the candidates to meet in one physical location with a substantial proportion of the AMS members present, but that need be no obstacle. Already a substantial proportion of the AMS members read the newsgroup `sci.math` on a regular basis, and most