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USPTO turns the corner on unexamined patent application backlog reduction

For the first time in nearly a decade, the number of first office actions within a fiscal year is exceeding the number of new applications being filed within that year.

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ALEXANDRIA, VA — The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) notched several milestones this week in its ongoing effort and commitment to reduce patent pendency and unexamined application inventory, while improving quality.

For the first time in nearly a decade, the USPTO's cumulative output has surpassed cumulative filings within a fiscal year. As of Monday, April 6, the USPTO's inventory of unexamined patent applications dropped to the lowest level in two years to 776,995, down from a high of 837,928 in January of 2025. The inventory is anticipated to continue to decline steadily through the third and fourth fiscal year quarters, historically our most productive half of the year. This reduction in unexamined patent application inventory was achieved while also exceeding all fiscal year patent quality statutory compliance targets.

"As stated in my recent testimony before the House Judiciary IP subcommittee, we will both eliminate choking backlogs AND improve quality," said John A. Squires, Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO. "While it may not seem like much, this milestone is significant because we've reached the tipping point of momentum now in favor of the applicant. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our examiners – the best in the world at what they do – America's Innovation Agency is back on its front foot. These metrics prove it. I'm especially gratified because at the same time, we've rightly welcomed more new applications under our new guidance, precedent, and eligibility disclosure submission program."

The USPTO also gained ground against its oldest unexamined applications. The office is closing in on early achievement of its aggressive fiscal year goal of virtually eliminating its inventory of unexamined applications that would otherwise exceed 36 months.

"Hitting this subtle but important increment early bodes well because we are intent on slashing application examination wait time," said Director Squires. "And reduced wait time means money – our studies show even a one-week reduction in pendency increases a U.S. company's value by approximately

$35,000 on average. For sure, we have major work to do, but all three trends now correlate in the right direction. In addition, we're steadily releasing robust AI tools to assist our examiners, and we're about halfway to our aggressive goal for new examiner hires. That's why I'm bullish."

Visit the USPTO's Patent Dashboard to view additional pendency information, as well as other critical indicators.

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