



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Eduardo Aguirre

Director

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Prepared Remarks
Angel Island Naturalization Ceremony

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

Let me begin by saying: it's a great day to be an American! And an even better day to become one!

It is indeed a distinct honor to administer this ceremony today on an island so rich in historical significance. The soil on which we stand has born witness to Miwok Indians who hunted and fished on it for over 6,000 years. It has housed American troops from the Civil War through the Cold War - seeing them off to defend our freedom and greeting them home upon their return. Angel Island is commonly referred as the "Ellis Island of the West". Despite the comparison to its sister across the country, the "Ellis Island of the West" does not conjure up similar images of opportunity and new beginnings. Instead, these images remind us of a time when our immigration system welcomed immigrants with isolated detention sites not open arms. The poignant poetry etched on these walls tells the tales of those who braved hell and high water for a chance at religious and political freedom in the United States. They tell stories of desperation, solitude and anxiety. It is important not to

forget what this island has witnessed and to keep its history alive and carry its lessons forward with us as part of our national identity. It is only by acknowledging our short comings, and learning from them, that we can truly be a great nation.

Today, on Angel Island, with this naturalization ceremony, the great hope and our ability to *Secure America's Promise* is again renewed.

In a few moments, we'll all be a part of something that so many have sacrificed so much for: US Citizenship. Just this month, I traveled to the Afghanistan, Iraq and Europe to naturalize men and women who are bravely fighting in our armed forces, tirelessly and diligently protecting their adopted country. It was one of the highlights of my career and life. Let me say that we all laughed, cried, prayed and felt extremely proud to be Americans. Overseas naturalizations were made possible by the President of the United States, who, last year signed the National Defense Act allowing us, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, to help fulfill their dream of American citizenship.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize one of our candidates, Maria Antonia Robertson, who came here from Spain a little over eight years ago. Today is a doubly happy day. Captain Steven Robertson, her husband, was able to come down from Fort Lewis where he's serving with the Army National Guard's 250th MI Battalion, soon to be deployed to Iraq for the next 17 months. The couple drove down from their Petaluma home today, but he'll have to fly back to Fort Lewis today to keep up his commitment to make our country safe. They're here today with their two children, Ariana, age 3 ½, and Miguel, two.

Our military, and their families, sacrifice much to fight terrorism and protect our freedoms. Word can not adequately express our admiration to all who serve in uniform for courageously serving our nation.

Today, I am here to make the dream of citizenship a reality for the Robertson's and for each and everyone of the candidates.

From today on, you will be able to fully pursue your version of the American Dream... relish in your success as you have truly earned it.

In contrast with days gone-by at Angel Island, we also welcome you with open arms to be part of the American family, as you bring many gifts and values... especially a love for this country.

Candidates, let me note how very privileged I am to join you in celebrating a personal and patriotic experience. You have lived in the United States, but today you become full partners in the American family.

I also very much appreciate the presence of the families and friends of our soon to be new citizens. I commend your support of their choice to take this momentous stride. You are part of their success today.

I too am a naturalized U.S. citizen – coming as a 15-year-old, without my family, from Cuba some 43 years ago. Some may find it remarkable that, as an immigrant, I would be in charge of the United States immigration services.

Instead of remarkable, I think it simply underscores the fact that naturalized citizens in the United States carry important and critical roles. We have no second-class citizens in America. Native born or naturalized, as Americans, we shoulder the same rights **and** responsibilities.

And I can say with confidence that America asks much of its citizens.

President Theodore Roosevelt noted, “The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight.” He may as well have been referring to any of the soon-to-be new citizens before us today.

Early in 2001, the President Bush presided over a naturalization ceremony on Ellis Island. It was at that time he said, “New arrivals should be greeted not with suspicion and resentment, but with openness and courtesy.”

As many immigrants can testify, that hasn’t always been the case.

The President challenged our organization, when we came into existence on March of last year, to reform a tired immigration system and to treat each individual who comes to us for help with respect and dignity.

Under the President’s leadership, I am happy to announce that whether it’s eliminating the backlog of applications, eliminating the endless lines outside our buildings, offering better customer service, and adding value to national security - we are delivering upon that challenge.

As an immigrant, I've walked in your shoes, and know that the journey to citizenship is usually a long one. Our commitment at USCIS is to make sure that from the beginning of a legal immigrant's journey, to well past the Oath of Citizenship, we are a helpful resource every step of the way.

Candidates, this ceremony represents a milestone in your lives. Each of you came to the United States some time ago as an immigrant. Today you will soon receive the highest title our government can bestow on anyone – **United States Citizen!**

34-years ago, when my wife, Tere - who has joined us today - and I were preparing for our own naturalization ceremony we learned that the Great Seal of the United States features an eagle holding a ribbon in its beak imprinted with the words **E Pluribus Unum – one out of many.**

These are not hollow words. They are words that we, as a nation, live and grow by.

Candidates for naturalized citizenship, as I call your country of origin, please stand **and** remain standing:

Call countries:

1. Canada,
2. Ecuador,
3. France,
4. Great Britain,
5. India,
6. Ireland,
7. Israel,
8. Japanese,
9. Mexico,
10. Nicaragua,
11. the People's Republic of China
12. the Philippines and
13. Suriname.

You are 20 individuals who are – at this moment in time - citizens of 13 different countries.

In just a brief moment you will become citizens of one country – The United States of America – **E Pluribus Unum – One out of many!**

Please raise your right hand and repeat after me the *Oath of Allegiance*:

I hereby declare on oath,
that I absolutely and entirely
renounce and abjure
all allegiance and fidelity
to any foreign prince, potentate,
state, or sovereignty,
of whom or which
I have heretofore been
a subject or citizen.
That I will support and defend
the Constitution and laws
of the United States of America
against all enemies, foreign and domestic;
that I will bear true faith
and allegiance to the same;
that I will bear arms
on behalf of the United States
when required by the law;
that I will perform noncombatant service
in the armed forces of the United States
when required by the law;
that I will perform work of national importance
under civilian direction
when required by the law;
and that I will take this obligation freely
without mental reservation
or purpose of evasion;
so help me God.

Congratulations! May God bless you and your families and continue to bless America. And I can proudly say YOU are now citizens of the United States of America!