



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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Thank you Mr. Hamilton and thank you Secretary Ridge for taking time out of your busy schedule to join us on such an important occasion.

America was built upon the principles of freedom, democracy and certain unalienable rights. The dreams and determination of immigrants, in whose footsteps I followed, enriched this land by bringing gifts of value, hard work, entrepreneurship, love for family and love for country.

Allow me to share with you the story of my American journey thus far, and why I deem the topic of today's conference to be so important to our nation's future.

I came to the United States as a 15-year-old refugee from Cuba, with no family, no money and no working knowledge of the English language.

Courageously, my parents sent me to escape a repressive regime to experience freedoms and opportunities found only in America.

Along the way, I was sheltered by Catholic Charities, cared for by the United Way, and helped by many others. A very affordable U.S. Department of Education student loan, allowed me to attend college, and with the encouragement of family, friends and mentors, overcame my long struggle with the English language and earned a degree from Louisiana State University in Business Administration.

After graduating from college I became involved in the banking industry. 32 years later, I retired from Bank of America as President of their International Private Bank.

In 2001, I made the choice of becoming a public servant of the United States by first serving in President Bush's Administration at the Export-Import Bank.

Now, my job as the first Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services within the Department of Homeland Security, under the dedicated leadership of Secretary Tom Ridge and the support from President Bush, is one of my greatest honors.

I'm sharing with you a glimpse of my American story not to tout my career accomplishments, but to emphasize the importance of embracing what our country has to offer.

Many selfless "gatekeepers" – in corporate, civic and public life – have also ushered me through doors of opportunity and in so doing, helped me to conquer real and imagined obstacles. Thus, I continue on my journey to realize my version of the American Dream.

Because of the sacrifices that my family and I have made, and because of so many selfless gatekeepers in my life, I take nothing for granted and constantly work towards giving back to a nation that has allowed me to soar to as great a heights as I can imagine.

I now serve as a gatekeeper of millions of immigrants that are in search of their own version of the American dream and who like me came to the United States in search of freedom and opportunity.

My service to this country as a public servant is a chance to give back and to offer my gratitude, loyalty and love for our country – America.

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 can play an important role in shaping American society as we have for years.

Native born or naturalized, as Americans we shoulder the same rights and responsibilities. In fact, immigrants contribute to every facet of American society. After all we are a nation of immigrants, born out of courage and share a common love for our country.