



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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Prepared Remarks
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Greeting

Good morning. It is a great pleasure and an honor for me to be here to jumpstart a national dialogue on the importance of promoting the integration of immigrants into American civic culture.

Our seminar today is reminiscent of the conferences that were organized one hundred years ago by the then U.S. Bureaus of Education and Naturalization when America faced its first “great wave” of immigration. This is truly a historical event.

And today, as Alfonso Aguilar noted with America facing one of the largest migration waves in its history, a conference such as this is in great need. Our nation continues to welcome over one million legal permanent residents and over 450,000 new citizens each year. It is a critical time to discuss how we are moving forward as a nation.

The purpose of the conference is to promote a national dialogue on the importance of civic literacy or an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities in the United States.

Today's conference, with the partnership of Mr. Hamilton and the Woodrow Wilson Center is the work of the Office of Citizenship within the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Office has the responsibility, to promote instruction and training on citizenship rights and responsibilities and to provide immigrants with information and the tools necessary to successfully integrate into American civic culture.

The Office of Citizenship, led by Alfonso Aguilar has worked tirelessly in the last year to develop the fine products you have received today. The Office has also met with numerous community based organizations, noted academics, key representatives from federal and state government, adult educators and the business community nationwide to promote its mission, and to develop the best ways to coordinate initiatives that affect each of us as Americans.

This is the first time in recent history that the federal government has developed a formal leadership role in developing an immigrant integration program. The task is critical to our country as we are a nation based on civic ideals and constitutional principles. As Alfonso described, what binds us as Americans are common civic ideals, like tolerance for others, liberty, social responsibility and equality.

President Bush clearly reaffirmed this principle when he stated that, "America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens." He said, "Every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less, American."

With that said, I would like to thank everyone for joining us today as we move toward building a stronger America.

At this time, I would like to introduce our guest speaker, the Honorable Alberto Gonzales – a fellow Texan and my good friend.

Judge Gonzales was commissioned as Counsel to President George W. Bush in January of 2001. His work in civic activities and in the community is well recognized throughout the country. Prior to serving in the White House, he served as Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas.

I am proud to introduce our honored guest, Judge Alberto Gonzales.