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Prepared Remarks

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Good Morning! Let me begin by saluting the men and women who offer their services to this great country. Today, and throughout the week, we celebrate "Public Service Recognition Week" in no better place than in the nation's capitol.

Since 1985, our country has set aside a time to celebrate and honor those who serve America faithfully as federal, state and local government employees. Our contributions should always be recognized as an invaluable service ensuring that our government remains strong.

One year ago, President George W. Bush offered me the opportunity of a lifetime... to serve my adopted country and at the same time the millions who like me keep coming to the United States for freedom and opportunity.

The President presented a daunting challenge, to reform the country's immigration system that helped me to become apart of the United States years ago. What would you have done if the President asked you? For me there was only one option: Yes, Mr. President! Thank you Mr. President!

I have the honor of serving as the first Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services within the Department of Homeland Security.

The President has entrusted me, and my team of 15,000 USCIS employees to uphold the integrity of the immigration system. This is the very system that afforded me the opportunities I once only dreamed about. Thus empowered I am filled with the civic responsibility, the moral obligation, and the strong desire to serve the American people.

Of course, I'm not alone in how I feel. The Department of Homeland security consists of over 180,000 employees; including my team of 15,000 at USCIS. We have a common goal, one vision – Preserving our freedoms, protecting America... We secure our homeland.

Secretary Tom Ridge, of the Department of Homeland Security said, “Public service is not an easy job, it’s demanding dedication to duty, conviction of purpose, and it shows great strength of character.” He said, “Public servants like you gain more than a paycheck or an accolade. Ours is a pursuit that has as its greatest reward the knowledge that the work we do does indeed make a difference.”

At DHS my 180,000 associates are leading the unified national effort to secure America. We will prevent and deter terrorist attacks and protect against and respond to threats and hazards to the Nation. We will ensure safe and secure borders, welcome lawful immigrants and visitors, and promote free-flow of commerce.

So very much of what we are as a nation depends upon the caliber of contribution public service employees make. In no other endeavor can you more directly serve our country’s cause or support its values than in the public sector.

The security of this nation lies in the success of public servants and the support that we receive from the public.

September 11th

The events of September 11th remind us of the values and freedoms many took for granted, such as our ability to pursue progress and prosperity and our sense of security. And because our Nation’s way of life is very much at risk from those who wish us harm, the imperative of service to society becomes all the more important.

I believe our nation’s response to the event’s of September 11th have helped us strengthen our country. Many decided to serve America by entering the public sector and contributing to its success and safety. As a public servant who arrived in Washington three years ago, barely a few days after Sept 11, 2001, and as today’s representative of Pres. Bush’s Administration, I feel gratified to note an even greater sense of national community reborn out of tragedy.

At USCIS – my 15,000 employees and I have embraced three core values: Respect, Integrity and Ingenuity.

These core values guide our daily activities in the way we treat our customers, each other, and the important responsibility that we have in the United States to remain a welcoming nation of immigrants.

But that’s just for my organization. What you have here on the National Mall is an incredible display of how government employees feel about the work they do and how proud they are to be serving this great nation.

You see progress and commitment to the American people that their government is committed to serve and uphold a greater cause than themselves. Our work as public employees gives our Nation hope and optimism about building a better, safer, fairer, and more just society.

Allow me a moment to proudly single out our men and women in uniform who are serving heroically to protect our freedoms here and overseas. It is all too common for many to underestimate the importance of clearly expressing our respect and support for those who serve in the armed forces of the United States. Respect for all public servants, but especially those who wear military uniforms, must be a basic value in our community.

Public service is a high calling and I salute those who have responded.

As for the next generation of American workers – ask what you can do for your country. We have an opportunity to awaken the next generation to the ultimate satisfaction of making a real contribution to their country and the world.

Whether it's fighting terror; security our borders; ensuring Social Security benefits to citizens; discovering treatments of diseases; protecting national parks, or providing relief for victims of natural disaster; or eradicating poverty in the United States – those challenges, and our ability to carry on our work and continue to demonstrate how the world can be better, are the most important ways in which we will prevail as one nation.

I applaud and thank public servants for your patriotism, service, and commitment.

God Bless America!