



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Independence Day Naturalization Ceremony at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum

Release Date: July 2, 2019

Speech by USCIS Acting Director Ken Cuccinelli II (as prepared):

- I would like to begin by thanking Alice Greenwald and the 9/11 Memorial and Museum staff for hosting today's ceremony in this remarkable venue.
- New citizens, on behalf of the men and women of USCIS, it is my honor to be the first to address you as, "My fellow Americans."
- It is a distinct privilege for me to join you and take part in such an important milestone in your lives.
- This naturalization ceremony today – the first one ever held in this hallowed space – embodies both our history and our future as a nation.
- The 9/11 Memorial and Museum represents one of the most tragic days in our history. Yet it also represents our spirit as a nation, and speaks to our strength, resilience, perseverance and optimism as a people.
- This July 4th, we will celebrate the birth of our nation 243 years ago. Starting on July 4, 1776, and continuing through today, the citizens of this country have stood firm in the face of adversity and challenge. Throughout our history, we have come together to turn tragedy into strength and opportunity – to forge our future together as citizens. A clear example of this American strength was the resounding patriotism all citizens showed in the aftermath of 9/11.
- We are stronger today because of naturalized citizens like all of you, individuals who followed the rules, upheld our laws, and chose to make a permanent commitment to the United States.
- You, as America's newest citizens, now play a part in ensuring that our country will continue to be a strong and vital nation.
- You strengthen the foundation of our nation as you make positive contributions to America – contributions as unique as each of you.
- I ask that you dedicate yourself to exercising your new rights and meeting your responsibilities as U.S. citizens.
- Register to vote. Get involved in your children's school and your local community. Volunteer at a local organization – we have many of them in America.
- Indeed, one of our candidates today has been an active volunteer, and has a close tie to the 9/11 Memorial.
- Gaby Catalina Sonberg has worked and volunteered helping other immigrants realize their dream of becoming naturalized U.S. citizens and also enjoys volunteering at Catholic Charities in her spare time.
- As a 6th grader, Ms. Sonberg remembers that her father was working at a construction project near The World Trade Center on the day of the attacks and that he returned to the area in the following days to help out.
- Thank you, Ms. Sonberg, for giving back to your community and your new country.

- I also encourage all of you to pursue civic engagement. You may have the opportunity to serve on a jury, operate a business, or run for public office. And you could serve in our armed forces.
- Several of our candidates today have already done just that.
- Private Shamsiyyah Garba Jibo was born in Nigeria. After coming to the United States, she decided to join the National Guard. Ms. Jibo loves serving our country and fighting for freedom, and she is excited about her upcoming adventures in the Army. Ms. Jibo has completed Basic Training and the Advanced Individual Training course, and we are honored to have her here today.
- Felix Maria Castillo Lachapelle joined the U.S. Army 47 years ago—on June 29, 1972—during the Vietnam War. He volunteered to fight for this country even though he was not a U.S. citizen. He considers this country the best country to live in as it is the most democratic country in the world. He's not wrong.
- Thank you both for your service to this country.
- To all our new citizens, you are now responsible for safeguarding our republic and ensuring that our nation continues to grow and thrive.
- As you celebrate our Independence Day this week, I encourage each of you to reflect on the rights and responsibilities that come with U.S. citizenship.
- In the Declaration of Independence, our Founding Fathers declared: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Dr. Martin Luther King called this our national creed.
- These ideals are the foundation of our country and have guided the United States for more than two centuries. America is not perfect, but it is the greatest country in the world.
- As citizens of this great country, American history is now your history and the American future is yours to help shape.
- I am proud to welcome you as our newest American citizens.
- Congratulations!
- Thank you.

Last Reviewed/Updated: 07/02/2019