



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Independence Day Naturalization Ceremony on the USS Constitution

Release Date: July 2, 2019

Speech by USCIS Deputy Director Mark Koumans (as prepared):

- I would like to begin by thanking the United States Navy and the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts for hosting today's naturalization ceremony here on the USS Constitution.
- To our candidates for naturalization,
- The Oath of Allegiance that you will take today is the same oath that both of my parents took more than 50 years ago when they became American citizens also right here in Boston. Perhaps like some of your children, I was born in this country, but my mother and father both immigrated here from the Netherlands. So it is a distinct privilege for me to take part in such an important moment in your lives.
- Perhaps like you, my parents settled in Boston, which is where I was born and which was my home for the first decades of my life. I grew up and went to school in Arlington and got my first job at what used to be the Bank of Boston, downtown on Federal Street. My wife grew up in Belmont and we got married in King's Chapel on Tremont Street. I have always been, and always will be, a fan of the Bruins, Celtics, Patriots, and Red Sox. So Boston is home and it's great to be home.
- But that's enough about me, because today we celebrate your first day as American citizens and what it means to be an American.
- We, as Americans, are also commemorating another important day today.
- On July 4, 1776 – that's 243 years ago – the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, setting in motion a chain of events to form a free and independent nation.
- It is an honor to celebrate your naturalization here in Boston, known as the birthplace of the American Revolution and home to many historic sites and monuments, including the USS Constitution.
- Also known as "Old Ironsides," this unique and iconic ship has served our country for more than 220 years.
- Named by President George Washington, the USS Constitution is the oldest commissioned ship in the United States Navy, and naval officers and crew continue to serve aboard her.
- She earned the nickname "Old Ironsides" during the War of 1812, when cannon fire from enemy ships could not penetrate her strong hull, which was made of oak sheathed in copper forged by Paul Revere. A sailor who watched the cannon balls bounce off the sides shouted, "Her sides are made of iron!"
- This ship that inspired our nation so long ago continues to inspire us with her strength and endurance.
- Not far from where the ship is berthed is Bunker Hill, the site of one of the key battles of the Revolutionary War, which was touched off by our Declaration of Independence. Other historical turning points during that period include the famous lanterns hung in the Old North Church, the Boston Tea Party, and the first shots fired at the Boston Massacre. I hope you are familiar with these events that shaped our nation's history. Did you know that one of the half dozen men who died in

the Boston Massacre was Crispus Attucks, who was of African American and Native American descent? Immigrants like him and like you have been in Boston for a long time indeed.

- As you become our newest U.S. citizens today, this history is now YOUR history, and you will be part of the next chapter of our shared history.
- It is your responsibility to use the citizenship you have earned, along with your unique experiences, skills, and talents to make positive contributions to strengthen and shape the future of your community and your nation.
- I ask you to 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. Serve in our armed forces. Serve on a jury when called. Run for public office.
- I encourage each of you to reflect on our founders' words from the Declaration of Independence: "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."
- Let me add to that the words of a famous Bostonian, Samuel Adams: "The liberties of our country, the freedom of our civil constitution, are worth defending against all hazards: And it is our duty to defend them against all attacks."
- These words, along with those enshrined in the United States Constitution, represent the founding principles of our country and have guided us for more than two centuries.
- The ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence are as relevant today as they were in 1776, and I hope they will inspire you in your lives as American citizens.
- Let me leave you with those two thoughts: that we all have equal rights, and that our liberties are worth defending.
- As the agency that administers the nation's lawful immigration system, USCIS has been with you from the day you sought your first immigration status, to the day you became a lawful permanent resident, to today when you take the Oath of Allegiance.
- I am proud to welcome you as the newest generation of American citizens, as individuals who have made a commitment to this great nation.
- Congratulations to you all for becoming American citizens here today.
- And now I would like to read to you a message from USCIS Acting Director Ken Cuccinelli, who today is in New York City welcoming new citizens at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.
- "On behalf of all the dedicated men and women of the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, I want to congratulate you on becoming citizens of our great nation today. As Americans, we are united not by background, race, or religion, but rather by our common citizenship, which is based on democratic ideals, equal and individual rights, and shared responsibilities. Upon taking the Oath of Allegiance, you join a long legacy of Americans who have contributed to the vibrancy and success of this country. As you become part of this special legacy today, I encourage you to use your talents and skills each day to build a better, stronger, and brighter America for all here today and for the future generations to come. Along with all the rights comes the responsibilities of citizenship. It is now your duty to make positive contributions to your community and to the Nation. The United States welcomes you, and as fully vested members of this great nation, may you chart a successful path as our newest citizens." ~ Ken Cuccinelli II, Acting Director, USCIS
- Thank you.

Last Reviewed/Updated: 07/02/2019