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Prepared Remarks
Citizenship Day Ceremony on Ellis Island

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Good morning. It is indeed a distinct honor to administer this ceremony today on a historical island that was once a gateway through which more than 12 million souls passed through in the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. Those immigrants came in search of freedom and opportunity.

When they left behind the old world, the millions who landed at Ellis Island came with a yearning and a vision of a better life. Many sought economic opportunity, political freedom, but above all, they surely wanted the rights, the duties and the dignity of American citizenship.

Today, on Ellis Island, the great hope and the great miracle of “America” is again renewed.

Candidates for citizenship let me begin by saying it’s a great day to be an American! And an even better day to become one! Congratulations!

This week, the United States celebrates Constitution week, where the nation remembers those who have fought and have died to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.

We recall and reiterate the vow of President Abraham Lincoln that these “dead shall not have died in vain – that this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of

freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

In remembrance of the signing of the Constitution and in recognition of the Americans who strive to uphold the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, President Bush has proclaimed today, September 17th as Citizenship Day.

So, I say again... it's a great day to become an American!

Today your dream turns into reality, becoming citizens of this great nation. From today on, you will be able to fully pursue your version of the American Dream. Relish in your success as you have truly earned it.

We also welcome you with open arms to be part of the American family as you bring many gifts and values, especially a love for this country.

Candidates, let me note how very privileged I am to join you in celebrating a personal and patriotic experience. You have lived in the United States, but today you become full partners in the American family.

I also very much appreciate the presence of the families and friends of our soon to be new citizens. I commend your support of their choice to take this momentous stride. You are part of their success today.

Candidates, we celebrate this year's Citizenship Day just six days after the 3rd anniversary of September 11th. Before the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center, we would have been able to look out these glass doors, past these waters, and see those two magnificent buildings standing tall.

After that unforgettable experience on that unforgettable day, you choose to stand by America and support it by becoming Americans. In fact, last year, my

organization, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalized over 450,000 new citizens, a number that has steadily grown since September 11, 2001. Since the day the twin towers fell until today, America has welcomed well over a million and a half. And as we celebrate Citizenship Day, we as a nation are welcoming over 20,000 new Americans.

I too am a naturalized U.S. citizen, coming as a 15-year-old, without my family, from Cuba. 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 are not second-class citizens. Native born or naturalized, as Americans we shoulder the same rights and responsibilities. In fact, immigrants contribute to every facet of American society, including the military.

This is why I'd like to especially recognize our service members present here today.

Josanne Jeffrey from Trinidad and Tobago and Marcus Forvil, a native of Haiti are both serving in the U.S. Army Reserve.

They were both activated to support the war on Terror in Iraq. You have fought to protect the very freedoms that your soon-to-be adopted country cherishes and loves.

To you, and others, serving in uniform: Words simply cannot capture our country's gratitude for your service. Know that we are behind you, and that we support you completely. You are carrying out a just and noble cause for freedom will triumph over terror.

As Commander-In-Chief, our President understands the risks involved in serving in the U.S. Military, especially in times like this, he and Congress have given their full support to allow us to begin holding ceremonies like this one overseas to naturalize those serving in the military, while serving in combat.

I am happy to announce that beginning October 1, of this year, USCIS will bring citizenship overseas to those who are fighting to protect our freedoms.

Lets give a round of applause to Josanne and Marcus, as well as all who serve in the United States Military.

Whether military or civilian, America asks much of its citizens.

President Theodore Roosevelt noted, "The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight." He may as well have been referring to any of the soon-to-be new citizens before us today.

For instance, I want to especially highlight some of our candidates here today.

In 1992, Ismeta Krcic fled the siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia, in the midst of the Yugoslavian conflict. Her husband at the time joined the resistance and has been missing ever since. She was 31 years old when her odyssey took her from Sarajevo to Kosovo and then to Turkey. She and her son ultimately found safe haven in the United States in 1994. After ten years in America, she is becoming a U.S. Citizen. Courage like yours Ms. Krcic is astounding. Your husband may not be with you here, but consider us here today your extended American family.

Bharati Lokhai arrived in the United States with her family from Guyana at the age of 10. She has an exciting journey ahead as she is on the brink of new adventures. Bharati will graduate from high school next year in June. She says she wants to become a public servant to give back to this great nation. She

plans to become a working member of the United States federal government one day. Bharati thank you for your patriotism.

I also would like to highlight Maria Sanchez. Maria left her native Honduras in 1993 to join her husband in the United States. She currently serves as a Social Worker offering assistance to community members to help them better participate in American society. After 11 years of being in the United States, Maria is becoming an American Citizen.

From just these three examples alone, I would say, that this group before me is already pulling their weight!

Early in 2001, the President also presided over a naturalization ceremony on Ellis Island. It was at that time he said, "New arrivals should be greeted not with suspicion and resentment, but with openness and courtesy."

As many immigrants can testify, that hasn't always been the case. The President challenged our organization when it came into existence on March of last year to reform a tired immigration system and to treat each individual who comes to us for help with respect and dignity.

Under the President's leadership, I am happy to announce that whether it's eliminating the backlog of applications, eliminating the endless lines outside our buildings, offering better customer service, and adding value to national security. Today, we are delivering upon that challenge.

Your journey to citizenship has been a long one. Our commitment at USCIS is to make sure that from the beginning of your immigration journey to well past the Oath of Citizenship, we are with you every step of the way.

Candidates, this ceremony represents a milestone in your lives. Each of you came to the United States some time ago as an immigrant. Today you will soon receive the highest title our government can bestow on anyone – United States citizen.

34-years ago, when my wife, Tere, who has joined us today, and I were preparing for our own naturalization ceremony we learned that the Great Seal of the United States features an eagle holding a ribbon in its beak imprinted with the words E Pluribus Unum – one out of many.

These are not hollow words. They are words that we, as a nation, live and grow by.

Candidates for naturalized citizenship, as I call your country of origin, please stand and remain standing:

Call countries:

1. Albania
2. Antigua-Barbuda
3. Argentina
4. Bangladesh
5. Bosnia
6. Brazil
7. Bulgaria
8. China
9. Colombia
10. Costa Rica
11. Cuba
12. Dominican Republic
13. Ecuador

14. France
15. Ghana
16. Greece
17. Guyana
18. Haiti
19. Honduras
20. Iran
21. Ireland
22. Italy
23. Jamaica
24. Japan
25. Lebanon
26. Mali
27. Mexico
28. New Zealand
29. Nigeria
30. Norway
31. Pakistan
32. Panama
33. Peru
34. Philippines
35. Poland
36. Romania
37. Russia
38. South Korea
39. Sri Lanka
40. Switzerland
41. Trinidad and Tobago
42. Ukraine
43. United Kingdom

You are 102 individuals who are at this moment in time citizens of 44 different countries.

In just a brief moment you will become citizens of one country – The United States of America – E Pluribus Unum – One out of many!

Please raise your right hand and repeat after me the *Oath of Allegiance*:

I hereby declare on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen. That I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the armed forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I will take this obligation freely without mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

Congratulations, you are now citizens of the United States of America!

God bless you and may God continue to bless America!