

Naturalization Ceremony Remarks
Sacramento, California
August 21, 2013

“A Call to Service”

My ... Fellow ... Americans ... sounds good, doesn't it?

You've all worked so very hard to hear those words, so let me repeat them: My Fellow Americans! Let me be among the first to congratulate all of you, your family, and your friends, on this tremendous accomplishment. American citizenship is a prized possession, sought by many, granted to few, so take pride in your hard work and in the journey that brought you here today.

You know, everyone in this hall has an immigrant story. Let me tell you a little about my own. I stand before you today a fourth generation Californian.

On my father's side, my ancestors came from the British Isles, Switzerland, Germany, and other European nations. They were American pioneers who crossed the Great Plains in covered wagons in the 1850s to help build the new state of California.

On my mother's side, they were Italian immigrants who came to this country through Ellis Island in the early 20th century under the shadow of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

My immigrant ancestors were prospectors and public servants, farmers and furniture salesmen, they were teachers, small business owners, professors, and lawyers.

They were men and women who served our nation in war and in peace, and they marched for civil rights and rallied for social justice. But they also coached Little League, volunteered in their children's schools, and helped to build their communities.

And their stories are not so very different from your own.

In my day job as the State Director of the US Department of Agriculture, I like to tell people that I'm in the American Dream business. The loans that I make to farmers and ranchers help them to build their American dreams.

Developing new businesses, expanding their markets, hiring more employees, and building greater financial security for their families.

Immigrants, and today, new citizens like you, are obviously dreamers, too. Like my ancestors, you came to this country looking to build your own version of the American dream.

Seeking a better life ... looking for greater economic opportunity ... escaping war and political persecution ... and building a brighter future for your children.

You've chosen the fertile soil of America to build your dream and for that I salute you ... and your new country needs you!

It needs your active citizenship in our democracy.

It needs your entrepreneurial spirit to help sustain our economy.

It needs your diverse cultural contributions to strengthen our American mosaic.

It needs your engagement in the schools, churches, and civic institutions of our towns and cities.

America, my friends, needs you.

Over 50 years ago, our 35th president, John F Kennedy famously asked "not what your country could do for you, but what you could do for your country."

It's time for you to accept that challenge, that mantle of responsibility that your citizenship carries with it. It's time for you to serve your new nation.

My fellow Americans, your new country needs you now to write the next chapter of your own American dream story and to proudly stamp it Made in America!

Congratulations on becoming citizens of the greatest nation on earth!

May God bless all of you and may God bless the United States of America!