

**2.17.12**

**USCIS Naturalization Ceremony in Honor of Presidents' Day**

75 immigrants take the Oath of Allegiance to become U.S. Citizens  
Federal Hall National Memorial, 26 Wall Street

Good morning everybody. Thank you Andrea for that kind introduction.

To our country's newest citizens – welcome and congratulations! Give yourself a round of applause. It is truly a privilege for me to be here and to celebrate this extraordinary moment with you. The 75 individuals being sworn in today come from 16 different countries – from as far away as Mongolia and Nigeria, to south of our Florida beaches, from the islands of Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

I can't think of a better place to celebrate this moment than here at Federal Hall, where George Washington took the oath of Office as the first American president, and where the first federal Congress drafted the Bill of Rights. It is also the site of America's first Supreme Court and Executive Branch offices. Right here at Federal Hall, our founding fathers launched the great experiment of American democracy – guided by the noble goal of liberty, equality, and justice for all.

Today, we recognize the sacrifices that each of you have made in leaving your home lands—and for some of you, your families and loved ones—to come to this country and build new lives here.

Everyone in this room has a different story. Some of you may have fled war-torn nations or persecution in order to secure a safe, peaceful future for your children. Some may have come to seek economic opportunity, while others to reunite with loved ones.

But despite our different stories and backgrounds, we all share a common belief in this great country – a belief in the power of American democracy, a belief in the boundless opportunities this country can bring for our children and grandchildren. If you work hard and serve your community, you can achieve great things.

This is a nation built by those who were born here, and by those, like you, who emigrated here. Our diversity defines us, it binds us, and strengthens us as a nation.

Just a few miles south of here stands the Statue of Liberty, the great icon of American diversity and inclusion. And in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty is Ellis Island, where more than 12 million immigrants entered the United States before it closed in 1954, including Albert Einstein, Harry Houdini, Bob Hope, and Charlie Chaplin. These individuals show how much immigrants can achieve *in* this country, and how much immigrants have done *for* this country. They—like all of you here today—are a true reflection of the collective American identity.

With the great rights and privileges of being an American citizen also come great responsibility. To be an American citizen calls on us to serve and give back to the community. It means staying informed, registering to vote, and exercising that right and

profound privilege to select the leaders who will represent you. And of particular importance to me as District Attorney, being an American citizen means serving as a juror. A critical aspect of our nation's justice system is that individuals who are accused of crimes are presumed innocent, and are judged by their peers – by you, their fellow American citizens. The New York State Supreme Courthouse at 60 Centre Street has these words by President Washington inscribed on its columns: “the true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government.” By serving on a jury, you become involved in the true administration of justice.

As the Manhattan District Attorney, my job is to keep the public safe while maintaining an unwavering commitment to the fair and just administration of the law, and equally as it applies to our immigrants. Immigrant communities are especially vulnerable to unscrupulous criminals. We have successfully prosecuted a number of individuals who took advantage of those who are new to this country, not fluent in the language, and struggling to navigate a complex legal and social services system. But all of this work is dependent on our new residents' trust that law enforcement is here to protect you - we are, and we will.

Congratulations again — I am extremely proud to call you my fellow American citizens. Thank you.