

Naturalization Ceremony
U.S. District Courthouse
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remarks by
Dr. Steven Ashby
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Good morning. I am honored to be here today to participate in this ceremony, and to share in what may be one of the most important days of your life: becoming a citizen of the United States of America.

I congratulate you on making the decision—and commitment—to become a citizen and to join the fabric of our nation. As you know, the United States is a land of immigrants. From our founders who came here seeking new opportunities and freedoms, to those who sought refuge from wars and persecution, to each of you with your own reasons for coming here, millions of people have immigrated to the United States to make new lives for themselves and their families.

Immigration and naturalization are personal for me. My grandparents emigrated from Portugal and I fondly remember their stories of making their way from the Azores to Hawaii, and ultimately to California. And my wife is an immigrant. She is Chinese but grew up in the Philippines and came to the United States to earn a Ph.D. at the University of Washington.

Immigrants like them—and like you—have defined our country and made us who we are. And as you assimilate into America, never forget whence you came, for your individual pasts are now part of our collective future. The cultures you represent and the traditions you cherish enrich our community and our nation. Your experiences help us all to understand and appreciate the rights and freedoms that we too often take for granted as Americans. And your skills, talents and expertise enhance our society, and contribute to our intellectual vitality and economic prosperity.

As the director of the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, I know firsthand the important contributions that immigrants make to our nation. We are fortunate to have some of the very best scientists and engineers in the world working at PNNL, including

many who have come from abroad to join our team. Some come for a short time and then return home, but others, like you, decide to stay and become citizens. They are invaluable members of our team and help to make our national laboratory the great institution that it is. The contributions of our foreign national employees and visitors, and those of our employees who are naturalized citizens, are essential to our success as a Laboratory and I am proud to call them colleagues.

The important role of immigrants is not new, of course—for either the lab or our community. As you undoubtedly know, our community was instrumental in helping to win World War II. The Hanford site, just a few miles up the road from here, played a central role in the Manhattan Project that created the atomic bomb that ended that war.

Immigrants made important scientific and engineering contributions to the development of the atomic bomb. From Italian-born Enrico Fermi to German-born Albert Einstein, European refugees did much of the theoretical research that underpinned the project. These immigrants were every bit as determined as American-born citizens to win the war. And in some cases, maybe it was even more personal because they had seen their native countries overrun by fascists and wanted to help stop the evil from spreading.

Our community owes much of who we are today to that era—and to the immigrants who came to America and the Tri-Cities at that time. There are tributes to that part of our history at The Reach museum and the new Manhattan Project National Park. If you have not already visited them, I encourage to do so.

President Barack Obama said, “What makes someone American isn’t just blood or birth, but allegiance to our founding principles and faith in the idea that anyone—from anywhere—can write the next chapter of our story.” In fact, one of his cabinet members, Sally Jewell, who serves as Secretary of the Interior, is a naturalized citizen. She became an American during college after emigrating from England with her parents as a young child. And our next First Lady, Melania Trump, is a naturalized citizen; she is originally from Slovenia.

Closer to home, we need look no further than our two great local universities for examples of the contributions that immigrants make to our State and Nation. The President of the University of Washington, Ana Mari Cauce, was born in Cuba and

came here with her parents. And the Chancellor of WSU Tri-Cities, Keith Moo-Young, is one of seven children born to parents who emigrated from Jamaica.

And you—the people in this room today—are among the newest Americans. You are creating a bright future for yourselves, your families and generations to come. I know you will work hard. I know this because you had to work hard to get here today. You had to learn about our nation's history, our system of government, and even a little geography to pass the civics test.

As a citizen, you will have certain rights and responsibilities after today. The U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services webpage summarizes them quite nicely in nine words: live, work, vote, lead, travel, reunite, support, serve, and participate.

Your new rights include the opportunity to **live** and **work** in the United States, including federal jobs that require citizenship. You have the right to **vote** in federal elections; and you can help to **lead** our nation by running for office. You can apply for a U.S. passport and **travel** abroad. You also may **reunite** with family members by applying to bring them to the U.S.

You also are expected to **serve** our nation when called upon, for example, by serving on a jury. And you are expected to **support** your nation through your loyalty and by upholding the Constitution. Finally, you have an obligation to **participate** in civic affairs in whatever way you can. I encourage you to get involved and give back to this great country, by serving in the PTA at your child's school, volunteering to teach someone new skills, or giving selflessly to the causes you care about.

As you reflect on your new lives as U.S. citizens, please remember those who fought and died to protect the freedoms that we all enjoy. Just a few days ago we celebrated Veterans Day to thank and honor our fallen heroes and those who have served in the U.S. armed forces.

Andrew Jackson, our seventh president, once said, "Every good citizen makes his country's honor his own, and cherishes it not only as precious but as sacred. He is willing to risk his life in its defense and is conscious that he gains protection while he gives it."

We are the land of the free—because of the brave. More than two million active duty military and reservists serve our nation each and every day. They sacrifice much to protect us and our freedoms. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Next week we will celebrate Thanksgiving. This will be your first as Americans—and as Americans we have much to be thankful for. Among the things for which I am grateful is living in a nation that embraces diversity, that welcomes and respects cultures from around the world, and that still serves as a beacon of freedom and opportunity. And I am especially thankful that immigrants like my grandparents and my wife not only came to America, but were able to call it home.

I'm proud to be an American. And I am thrilled that after today, you can join me in saying the same. Congratulations!