

NATURALIZATION SPEECH

My fellow citizens –

Nebraska's greatest author, Willa Cather, said: "The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman." Today, the history of America begins a new chapter in your hearts. You have chosen the United States of America as your country, and you have chosen to begin your new life as Americans in the heart of America – the state of Nebraska.

Thank you for making these choices. America will be enriched by your citizenship.

Today, you also renounced your former citizenship in other countries. For some of you that was an easy decision. For others, that may have been a painful choice. I remind you that while you have renounced your former citizenship and pledged your loyalty to the United States, you do not give up your own history and culture. Those things you cherish about your past -- your memories of family and friends, your music, your literature, your celebrations, your manners, please bring with you. Those of us who have been American citizens for many years can learn much from you.

There may be things in your past that you gladly leave behind you. Just as you chose what items to pack in your suitcase when you came to America, you will choose what customs from your past you will abandon and what you will preserve.

Some of you have lived in America for many years, and some of you are still growing accustomed to the United States. You all know that your new country is not perfect. Everything that is American is not necessarily good. You may be faced with difficult choices as you decide what aspects of the American culture you will adopt and what you will reject. You will make decisions about who you will trust and who cannot be trusted. You will make choices about your work, your friends, your education and the education of your children. You will decide how your money will be spent, how your leisure time will be used, and how you will vote. As you make these decisions, you will consider what is best for you, what is best for your family – especially your children, and what is best for your fellow citizens.

You may have heard the Latin phrase – E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One. We are one nation of people from many backgrounds bound together by certain principles of freedom, equality, and justice. We all share a responsibility to each other and to future Americans to preserve freedom, equality and justice. America and the

principles it represents will always be at danger, at home and abroad. Your new country needs your help. America's strength does not lie in its armed forces or its economy as much as in the hearts and minds of its people – good people, of strong character. People like you.

I began my remarks with a quote from the Nebraska author Willa Cather. Cather wrote about immigrants who came to America and settled in Nebraska. She wrote about Bohemians, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Mexicans, Jews, French, and Irish. She observed that within one generation, the immigrants and their children were as successful or more successful than the Americans whose ancestors had lived in this country for generations. Hard work, determination, and a true understanding of the nature of the American dream gave the immigrants an advantage over people who took their blessings for granted.

My own grandfather immigrated to America from Ireland when he was 13 years old. His family rented farmland in Ireland, and when their crop failed one year, they were evicted. They were in debt and had no home. At that time, the Union Pacific Railroad advertised in Ireland, encouraging people to come to Nebraska. The Union Pacific needed workers. The advertisements said that Nebraska was the most beautiful and prosperous place in America, and had the best weather. For my grandfather and his family, Nebraska was a beautiful new home. I am grateful to the United States for the opportunities it has given me and my family over the years, and I have chosen to stay in Nebraska, although the Union Pacific may not have told the truth about the weather.

I wish you great success as new American citizens. I hope that you will measure your own success not in terms of how much property you own, but according to how you preserve and share the American dream.

Willa Cather said “That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great.”

Today, you become a part of something great – America. And today, America becomes greater and more complete because of you. Congratulations.