

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MAINE

NATURALIZATION CEREMONY
SEPTEMBER 18, 2026
PORTLAND, MAINE

JUDGE STACEY D. NEUMANN PRESIDING

It is of interest to note that we have 41 new citizens from 25 countries here this morning:

Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Djibouti, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Rwanda, South Korea, South Sudan, Spain, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

Today I have the high honor and personal privilege of being the first to welcome you as newly admitted citizens of the United States. This is a momentous event not only for you but for generations of your family to come. So, cherish this moment; savor this moment; but perhaps most importantly, go home today and write about this moment so that future generations can learn the story of their American citizenship.

I am thrilled to be here with you today. This is, without question, among the most significant and moving duties we perform on the federal bench. Thank you for letting me share this moment with you.

A naturalization ceremony is one of the purest expressions of what this country aspires to be. America is not defined by ancestry, heritage, or any single story. It is defined by an idea: that people from every corner of the earth can join together to build a more generous, creative, and hopeful future. Today, your stories—your journeys, your sacrifices, your determination—become part of the American story.

We often hear that America is a “nation of immigrants,” almost as if it were a slogan. But it is a profound truth. From our earliest days, people have come here fleeing hunger, war, persecution, or poverty; seeking education, safety, work, and possibility. And in every era, immigrants have expanded this country’s conscience, creativity, and capacity to grow.

Today you join a community bound not by a single language, ethnicity, or religion, but by a shared promise: that a free and democratic nation can be strengthened by the talents, dreams, and hard work of people from all over the world. Your presence here shows that this promise endures.

As a nation of immigrants, we have long been shaped by people who carried that same longing for freedom into the work of building this country. Chinese laborers—many just teenagers—laid the rails that connected a continent. Mexican and Filipino farmworkers, led by Dolores Huerta, taught the nation that dignity in labor is a human right. Japanese American soldiers served in the 442nd Regiment with extraordinary bravery during World War II, even as their families were unjustly incarcerated at home. Immigrants and the children of

immigrants have not merely contributed to America's progress—they have pushed it to live up to its own ideals.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, whose Puerto Rican parents brought their hopes and determination to the mainland, has spoken of the impact of immigrants, reminding us that “the dynamism of our nation comes from our immigrant roots.” Immigrant contributions reach beyond politics and law, shaping art, memory, music, and business. **Consider Elie Wiesel**, who survived the Holocaust, and taught that memory is not passive—it calls us to act with courage and conscience. **Maya Lin**, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, reshaped our national memory with her design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—a memorial my father, a Vietnam veteran and son of Polish and German immigrants, visits to honor fellow soldiers. **Yo-Yo Ma**, the renowned cellist, reminds us that culture can be a bridge across differences. **Indra Nooyi**, former CEO and Chair of PepsiCo, shows how immigrants have shaped innovation and American economic growth. And, **Alysa Liu**, the daughter of a political refugee, whose 2026 Olympic gold medals prove that the pursuit of excellence—and the American Dream—knows no borders. Their contributions strengthen our communities, enrich our economy, and uphold the promise of our democracy.

Yet the deeper truth is this: even as a nation shaped and strengthened by immigrants, America has not always lived up to those ideals. Many immigrants still face challenges—long waits, complicated systems, moments of doubt, and times when the journey feels harder because of

misunderstanding or prejudice. Our history includes painful chapters: the exclusion of Chinese laborers, the incarceration of Japanese American families, and the many moments when newcomers are met suspicion instead of open doors.

Yet again and again, America has returned to its core promise. We grow—morally, economically, and culturally—when we choose inclusion over exclusion, hope over fear, and community over isolation. We become stronger when we recognize the dignity and potential of those who arrive on our shores. Today, as new citizens, you step into that ongoing story, joining generations of immigrants who have woven their own dreams and achievements into the very fabric of the American promise.

You may not think of yourselves as part of American history—but you already are. Your children and grandchildren will look back on this day as a turning point. They will inherit the courage it took to move to a new country, learn a new language, begin again, and persist through every challenge. They will inherit your belief in possibility—and America will inherit your talents, your dreams, and your love for your families, your communities, and this country.

Becoming an American citizen does not erase your past; it honors it. Your languages, your cultures, your food, your music, your memories—they do not make you less American than anyone who has lived here for decades. They make America more herself: a nation always expanding, always learning, always becoming. Today, you join this nation of immigrants—scholars, artists, innovators, caregivers, soldiers, teachers, engineers, parents—who have made this country what it is.

Isabel Allende, who immigrated from Chile, has said, “*Life is a gift—and with that gift comes a responsibility to help others.*” As new citizens, you gain rights that people around the world long for—the right to vote, to serve on a jury, and to run for local office, as well as the full protections of our Constitution and laws. But these rights carry responsibilities. Our democracy depends on citizens who stay informed, who speak up, who serve their communities, who defend justice, and who treat others with dignity and respect—even when we disagree; especially when we disagree. You will strengthen your neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and places of worship. You will enrich our culture, our economy, and our democracy. In doing so, you join generations of immigrants who have renewed and redefined what America can be.

We are a nation of immigrants. I am deeply honored to have shared this ceremony with you. What a privilege it is to welcome you as the newest citizens of the United States. This nation is stronger, richer, and more complete because you are now a part of it.

Congratulations—and welcome home.