

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

DISTRICT OF MAINE

NATURALIZATION CEREMONY

September 17, 2024

University of Southern Maine, Portland

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Official Court Reporter

(Prepared from manual stenography and
computer-aided transcription.)

1 (Proceeding commenced)

2 THE CLERK: Oh, yea! Oh, yea! Oh, Yea! All persons who
3 are summoned to appear this day or having anything to do before
4 the District Court in the United States now being held in
5 Portland within and for the District of Maine, the Honorable
6 Lance Walker and presiding, may and give their attendance and
7 they shall be heard. God save the United States of America and
8 this Honorable Court. Please be seated and come to order.

9 THE COURT: Good morning. Good morning.

10 AUDIENCE: Good morning.

11 THE COURT: That's precisely how I'm introduced when
12 I'm at home. I don't know why everyone is laughing at that.
13 Good morning, all. Let me welcome you here to this special
14 ceremony. I'm Lance Walker, the chief judge of the United
15 States District Court for the District of Maine.

16 And before we get right to it, I'd like to introduce some
17 special guests that we have with us this morning. First, and
18 most notably, is my friend and brand-new colleague sitting to
19 my right, United States District Judge Stacey Neumann.

20 JUDGE NEUMANN: Good morning, everyone. I want to let
21 you all know that this is actually my first official proceeding
22 to be a part of. And I couldn't be more honored to have it be
23 this celebration of you all today. So thank you. I'm so glad
24 to be here.

25 THE COURT: I'll confess that we were taking

1 photographs with phones when she put on the robe for the first
2 time just about five minutes ago. It was lovely.

3 I'd like to also welcome Darcie McElwee, who is the United
4 States Attorney for the District of Maine. Welcome. Halsey
5 Frank on behalf of Senator Susan Collins. Yes. Megan Stewart
6 on behalf the Senator King. Dorian Cole on behalf of
7 Representative Chellie Pingree. Maris MacGregor on behalf of
8 Representative Jared Golden.

9 Julia Smith and Dee Dee Wacksman representing the Maine
10 State Daughters of the American Revolution, Elizabeth Wadsworth
11 Chapter.

12 Members of the Colonial Dames of America in the State
13 of Maine are also here with us this morning.

14 Last, but certainly not least, Ms. Brenna Chalifour is
15 here with her AP U.S. Government and Politics Students from the
16 mighty Chevrus High School. Go Stags.

17 One of the most meaningful rights you enjoy as a new
18 American citizen is, of course, the right to vote. Some of you
19 might reasonably ask, how do I go about registering to vote.
20 Fortunately, we have with us this morning Mary Pat Donnellon
21 and several of her colleagues of the League of Women Voters of
22 the Greater Portland area, and they have the answers to all of
23 your questions. And you'll receive some more information about
24 that to help you know what to do in order to register to vote
25 and help elect the people who will lead your country.

1 I'd like to welcome Immigration Services Officers Brandee
2 Pryor, Robert Paradis, Scott Nielsen, and assistants Lauren
3 Perkins and Janzia Dapas who are present today and whose hard
4 work made this day possible for all of you. Welcome.

5 One of the highlights of the ceremony is the inspiring
6 music that we are privileged to hear. And to that end, I am
7 very pleased to recognize the Portland Community Chorus, led by
8 Nora Krainis, who is going to share with you now a medley of
9 patriotic songs.

10 (Music)

11 THE COURT: Thank you very much to the chorus.

12 I ask that you all stand now so we can recite the pledge
13 of allegiance.

14 ALL: (Pledge of Allegiance)

15 THE COURT: We now turn to the main event for which
16 you have waited for so long. Madam Clerk, please proceed with
17 the naturalization ceremony.

18 THE CLERK: Chief Judge Walker, Judge Neumann,
19 representing the United States Citizenship and Immigration
20 Service is Robert Paradis. Mr. Paradis will move to have the
21 oath of citizenship administered to 79 applicants.

22 THE COURT: Mr. Paradis, good morning. It's a
23 pleasure to have you here with us.

24 MR. PARADIS: Good morning, sir. Your Honor, I
25 present to you 76 candidates that have applied to become

1 citizens of the United States. Each of the candidates has been
2 interviewed by an officer of the U.S. Citizenship and
3 Immigration Services and, unless exempted by the law, has
4 demonstrate the ability to read, write, and speak English. In
5 addition, each has demonstrated his or her knowledge in
6 understanding of the history and principals and form of
7 Government of the United States. Therefore, Your Honor, I
8 recommend that these candidates be administered the oath of
9 allegiance, thereby admitting them to the United States
10 citizenship.

11 THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Paradis. Your motions are
12 granted. Madam Clerk, please administer the oath of
13 citizenship to the applicants

14 THE CLERK: Will the applicants please stand. Raise
15 your right hand while we administer the oath. Please repeat
16 after me: I hereby declare.

17 APPLICANTS: I hereby declare.

18 THE CLERK: On oath.

19 APPLICANTS: On oath.

20 THE CLERK: That I absolutely.

21 APPLICANTS: That I absolutely.

22 THE CLERK: And entirely.

23 APPLICANTS: And entirely.

24 THE CLERK: Renounce and abjure.

25 APPLICANTS: Renounce and abjure.

1 THE CLERK: All allegiance.

2 APPLICANTS: All allegiance.

3 THE CLERK: And fidelity.

4 APPLICANTS: And fidelity.

5 THE CLERK: To any foreign prince.

6 APPLICANTS: To any foreign prince.

7 THE CLERK: Potentate.

8 APPLICANTS: Potentate.

9 THE CLERK: State or sovereignty.

10 APPLICANTS: State or sovereignty.

11 THE CLERK: Of whom.

12 APPLICANTS: Of whom.

13 THE CLERK: Or which.

14 APPLICANTS: Or which.

15 THE CLERK: I have heretofore.

16 APPLICANTS: I have heretofore.

17 THE CLERK: Been a subject or citizen.

18 APPLICANTS: Been a subject or citizen.

19 THE CLERK: That I will support and defend.

20 APPLICANTS: That I will support and defend.

21 THE CLERK: The constitution and laws of the United
22 States of America.

23 APPLICANTS: The constitution and laws of the United
24 States of America.

25 THE CLERK: Against all enemies.

1 APPLICANTS: Against all enemies.
2 THE CLERK: Foreign and domestic.
3 APPLICANTS: Foreign and domestic.
4 THE CLERK: That I will bear true faith.
5 APPLICANTS: That I will bear true faith.
6 THE CLERK: And allegiance to the same.
7 APPLICANTS: And allegiance to the same.
8 THE CLERK: That I will bear arms.
9 APPLICANTS: That I will bear arms.
10 THE CLERK: On behalf of the United States.
11 APPLICANTS: On behalf of the United States.
12 THE CLERK: When required by law.
13 APPLICANTS: When required by law.
14 THE CLERK: That I will perform.
15 APPLICANTS: That I will perform.
16 THE CLERK: Noncombatant service.
17 APPLICANTS: Noncombatant service.
18 THE CLERK: In the armed forces.
19 APPLICANTS: In the armed forces.
20 THE CLERK: Of the United States.
21 APPLICANTS: Of the United States.
22 THE CLERK: When required by law.
23 APPLICANTS: When required by law.
24 THE CLERK: That I will perform work.
25 APPLICANTS: That I will perform work.

1

2

THE CLERK: Of national importance.

3

APPLICANTS: Of national importance.

4

THE CLERK: Under civilian direction.

5

APPLICANTS: Under civilian direction.

6

THE CLERK: When required by law.

7

APPLICANTS: When required by law.

8

THE CLERK: And that I take this obligation freely.

9

APPLICANTS: And that I take this obligation freely.

10

THE CLERK: Without any mental reservation.

11

APPLICANTS: Without any mental reservation.

12

THE CLERK: Or purpose of evasion.

13

APPLICANTS: Or purpose of evasion.

14

THE CLERK: So help me God.

15

APPLICANTS: So help me God.

16

THE CLERK: Please be seated.

17

THE COURT: That's quite a welcome to your new

18

citizenship.

19

It is of interest to note that we have 79 new citizens

20

from 33 countries. So I'm going to draw a deep breath and try

21

to do this in one take.

22

Countries here this morning are: Australia. Belarus.

23

Oh, I saw Australia waiving an American flag. Belarus.

24

Belize. Brazil. Burundi. Cambodia. Canada. Chile. China.

25

Congo. El Salvador. El Salvador got a "whoo." France.

1 Germany. India. Iraq. Israel. Jamaica. Kenya. Mexico.
2 Nepal. Not to be out done, right, Mexico. Nepal. Nigeria.
3 Norway. Philippines. I can always count on the Philippines.
4 Romania. Russia. Rwanda. The ceremony goes to Rwanda. Saint
5 Lucia. Sweden. Thailand. Togo.

6 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Here.

7 THE COURT: One lone voice in the back. Uganda.
8 United Kingdom. It's always the Brits. And Vietnam. Welcome.

9 Today I have the high honor and personal privilege of
10 being the first to welcome you as newly admitted citizens of
11 the United States. This is a momentous event not only for you
12 but for generations of your family to come. So cherish this
13 moment and savor this moment. But perhaps most importantly,
14 when you go home today record this moment so that future
15 generations can learn the story of their American citizenship.
16 And before you leave today, take a moment and look at each
17 other. You individually and as a group are now America.
18 Welcome to your new citizenship.

19 Today's ceremony is an expression of our country's
20 most fundamental promise: To secure a more perfect union. And
21 this lofty aspiration is made much more real by your presence
22 here today. You remind us of the value of our own citizenship.
23 The history of the United States is, after all, a history of
24 immigration.

25 The United States is a land of the fresh starts. Our

1 country was not founded upon racial, ethnic, religious, or
2 political identities. It was not founded on hereditary's
3 privilege or affiliation with favored family names. Our first
4 principal of American democracy was an idea expressed by Thomas
5 Jefferson on July 4, 1776, when he stated: We hold these
6 truths to be self-evidence, that all men are created equal,
7 that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable
8 rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of
9 happiness.

10 This is important for you to keep in mind. The
11 constitution is our civic compass. It creates the conditions
12 of liberty, and liberty is a condition of happiness. But as
13 Benjamin Franklin put it, the constitution doesn't guarantee
14 happiness, it only guarantees the pursuit of it. You have to
15 catch up with happiness, yourself. The philosopher Aristotle
16 says that virtue only manifests itself in action, in habit.
17 Maybe we could borrow from Aristotle when understanding our
18 duties as American citizens.

19 Our founding ideas are noble, and they are true. But it
20 is only by our actions that they have any meaning, any virtue.
21 Citizenship is an action word. When you take action, remember
22 that America's advantage is in the unity of a diverse people.
23 So please share your art, share your music, share your language
24 and especially, for me at any rate, please share your recipes
25 with your fellow Americans.

1 On a hot summer day in Philadelphia nearly 250 years ago,
2 Benjamin Franklin was leaving the constitutional convention at
3 Independence Hall when he was approached by a group of
4 citizens. A woman in the group demanded, What kind of
5 Government did you give us? A Republic or a Monarchy?
6 Franklin replied, a Republic, madam, if you can keep it.
7 Franklin knew then, and you should know now, that America's
8 success was not inevitable. And nothing about its continued
9 success is inevitable as we sit here so many years later.

10 Freedom, as history teaches us, is not the natural state
11 between governments and the people. A great many of your
12 fellow citizens have suffered and fought and died in the
13 struggle to bring life to the promises of our founding
14 covenant. If we are to continue to enjoy the blessings of
15 liberty, we must take our citizenship seriously.

16 So let me offer you three words to remind you how best to
17 do that: Grit; gratitude; grace. Have grit. By grit I mean
18 personal fortitude. Disagreement is essential to the function
19 of a republic, but being disagreeable is not. Nevertheless,
20 you may encounter those who mean to make you feel badly or to
21 make you feel excluded. Ignore them and press forward. I
22 promise you that there is nothing as satisfying as living a
23 life of purpose in spite of those who mean to discourage you.
24 President Kenny Roosevelt captured that very idea in his Man in
25 the Arena passage. And I look at his advice nearly every day.

1 His words hang in my chamber here at the federal courthouse
2 here in Portland. I recommend it to you as a call to action.
3 It is presidential permission for you to fail in your
4 endeavors, but it is a mandate for you to do so while daring
5 and trying.

6 Roosevelt tells us: "It is not the critic who counts; not
7 the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where
8 the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit
9 belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is
10 marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who
11 errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no
12 effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually
13 strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great
14 devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the
15 best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who
16 at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly,
17 so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid
18 souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

19 Gratitude. Reflect every now and then, like we do today,
20 about our unimaginable good fortune. The constitution is the
21 most ambitious and enduring document devised in human history
22 to maximize the power of free people to live in service of
23 noble ideals. Be ever grateful for that gift and let it inform
24 everything you do and say.

25 And, finally, grace. Sadly, too much of our discourse

1 with each other is unkind and intemperate. Resist the popular
2 temptation of being snarky. It has become the principal
3 vocation and pastime of far too many. To be good people and
4 therefore good citizens, we need to pull back from this
5 narcissistic abyss. Judge Learned Hand wisely observed that
6 the spirit of Liberty is the spirit which is not too sure it is
7 right. So I encourage you to engage your neighbors and leaders
8 with humility. And remember, while you may disagree with some
9 of your fellow citizens, they are not your enemies. You might
10 also consider that there are better ways to improve your
11 community than by being an amateur political analyst. With
12 then less hot takes on your favorite social media plat form.

13 You may, for example, want to consider the advice given by
14 the singer Lukas Nelson, the son of Willie Nelson, in his song
15 Turn Off The News (and Build a Garden) where he advises
16 periodically you ought to, you know, turn off the news, build a
17 garden.

18 Abide the truth that we are all in this together if we are
19 to be in it at all. By the same token, dare to be
20 unfashionable and think for yourself, but do so with grace. As
21 a candidate for the American presidency said many years ago,
22 patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the
23 tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. So the duty of a
24 lifetime falls to you now, our newest citizens.

25 Be well-informed. Start a business. Continue your

1 education. Practice your religion. Love your neighbor. It
2 makes no difference what brought you here. In the United
3 States, it does not matter who you were. It matters who you
4 are. So take your place in American history as faithful
5 stewards of the American promise.

6 On behalf of this country, I welcome you, I congratulate
7 you, and I wish for each of you the blessings of liberty.
8 Congratulations.

9 Ladies and gentlemen, in the lobby there will be a place
10 to gather. And you should check in at the USCIS table to
11 receive your certificate. After that, you may enjoy some
12 refreshments and take photographs with each other and with me,
13 if that's something you would like to do. But if you prefer to
14 leave immediately and celebrate in your own particular way,
15 that is of course perfectly fine too because, after all, ladies
16 and gentlemen, you are now Americans, and you can do what you
17 want.

18 This now concludes the formal proceedings. The Court will
19 stand in recess.

20 THE CLERK: All rise.

21 (Proceeding concluded)
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Michelle R. Feliccitti, Registered Professional
Reporter and Official Court Reporter for the United States
District Court, District of Maine, certify that the foregoing
is a correct transcript from the record of proceedings in the
above-entitled matter.

Dated: September 18, 2024

/s/ Michelle R. Feliccitti

Official Court Reporter