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The Honorable Pedro R. Pierluisi
Naturalization Ceremony
U.S. District Court
San Juan, Puerto Rico
April 16, 2009

I want to begin by extending my warmest congratulations to you all. I am honored to be here with you today, because this is truly your day. You should feel tremendous pride in what you have accomplished.

I have always believed that to be born a citizen of the United States is a blessing. To become a U.S. citizen through the naturalization process is a blessing as well. But it is something much more. You had to sacrifice a great deal to arrive at this moment. You had to struggle for it. You had to earn it.

This country is not perfect. I know that you are under no illusion that it is. But it is a great country.

Adlai Stevenson, a U.S. politician and diplomat during the 1950s, once said: “America is much more than a geographical fact. It is a political and moral fact—the first community in which men set out in principle to institutionalize freedom, responsible government, and human equality.”

America has always been—and it remains today—a work in progress. And since this country’s founding, the hard work of making America better has been carried out by intrepid men and women like yourself, immigrants from other shores whose character, passion and talent have continuously enriched the life of this nation and replenished its spirit. This is a great country, and it is a great country precisely because of people like you.

I do not pretend to know what set of circumstances and events led each of you to this ceremony today. Your stories are too diverse and complex to be painted with a single brush. Some of you may have come here to escape persecution or repression, others to seek a brighter economic future or because you met somebody from this country and fell in love. I am certain that all of you had to leave behind parents, siblings, children, or best friends when you decided to begin the long journey that has culminated in this day. As you sit here, you may be thinking about these

loved ones who could not make the journey with you or who did not live long enough to witness this moment. For that reason, it is only natural that your joy on this occasion may be mixed with a touch of sadness.

Today is a day to celebrate you, not to lecture you. But please accept this single piece of advice. When you depart this courthouse as newly-minted U.S. citizens, I hope you will resolve to become active citizens. Register to vote. Make your opinion known to elected officials like myself. Hold us accountable for our actions. Speak out when you see injustice in your midst. Volunteer in your community. Consider making public service your profession. In short, do your part to make sure the United States lives up to its ideals. As Abraham Lincoln once said: "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. And I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him."

I know that you will continue to lead lives that are worthy of great pride. Congratulations again on becoming citizens. And good luck to you all.