

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

## Press Center



## Ahead Of Independence Day, Secretary Jacob J. Lew Delivers Remarks At Naturalization Ceremony

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### *As prepared for delivery*

Thank you, Director Mayorkas, for conducting the oath of allegiance, and let me welcome all of our guests to the Treasury Department. To those who took the oath of citizenship this morning, congratulations on an extraordinary accomplishment. It is an honor to be among the first to address you as "my fellow Americans."

This occasion is especially poignant for me. My father was born in Poland. His family left their small town for America at the end of World War I. My mother's family made the journey just a few years earlier. They were lucky. They had the chance to leave before the Second World War was underway. Before it was too late. And they were especially fortunate to come here to America.

A country bounded physically by mountains, deserts, and oceans, but built on the promise of freedom and opportunity. A country where hard work can lead to a better life. Where we can shape our future and the futures of those around us. And where our children can achieve things beyond anything we can imagine. Today I stand here as a first generation American and as Treasury Secretary of the United States.

That is something my parents could never have foreseen half a century ago. Each of you has taken a separate journey, and each of you has your own story of challenges overcome. It took incredible resolve to become an American citizen. You had to work for it. No one gave this to you.

No one gave this to Hazrat Khan. He came here from Afghanistan and has devoted his career to helping vulnerable people around the world withstand political conflict and natural disasters.

No one gave this to Mahad Abdille. He fled war-torn Somalia when he was 16 years old without knowing a word of English. But he seized the chance to rebuild his life by learning the language of his new country, making friends, and finding work.

And no one gave this to Herbert Crooks. Herbert is a Gulf War veteran who grew up in Panama and served in the Marines for eight years. When his two sons learned he was about to become a U.S. citizen, they were surprised. They thought he was already a citizen. Herbert's reply: "On paper I am not. But deep down, I have always been American."

Today, we are proud of these new Americans. And grateful to every one of you who raised your hand to take the oath a few moments ago. Your decision to become Americans has made our country stronger. We cannot forget we have always been a nation of immigrants. It is what defines us. And it is what makes our society and our economy so vibrant.

It is no surprise that when you look at the list of America's best businesses, many of them were started by immigrants or children of immigrants. We are talking about 40 percent of all Fortune 500 companies. More than a quarter of all new small businesses. And one out of every four high tech start ups.

You see, immigration is not just something that is consistent with our values. It is also consistent with growing our economy, increasing jobs, and expanding our middle class. Yet the troubling truth remains that too many immigrants do not get a fair shot at the American dream. Too often, they are forced to live and work in the shadows. This not only hurts them, it hurts America as well.

For instance, our immigration system right now opens our top universities to the brightest minds from all around the globe. But this same system tells these men and women to get out of our country once they are done studying and have received all their training. That is basically pushing new innovation, new jobs, and new businesses beyond our borders.

That encourages industries of the future to grow outside the United States. The truth is, this is not good economic policy. But that is the way our immigration system works today. And it is like a headwind in our economic sails.

Now, there is a bipartisan immigration bill before Congress that would fix our broken immigration system. This comprehensive legislation does a number of things. It strengthens our borders. It provides a pathway to earned citizenship for the 11 million people who are here illegally. And it will boost economic growth.

This bill will drive growth by bringing highly skilled scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs to the United States. At the same time, this bill will create a new wave of consumers who will fuel demand and generate economic activity. The effect will be enormous. More new businesses. More new jobs, and more exports.

We will also see our deficits shrink, and with added workers on our payrolls, Social Security and Medicare will be put on a more stable footing. In fact, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, this legislation will lower our deficits by nearly a trillion dollars over the next two decades. So it is important for our economy, and for who we are as a people that we reform our immigration system.

And I hope that as new citizens, you will make sure the door you just walked through is open to the millions of hard-working immigrants who want to call America home. Tomorrow—July 4th—we mark the birth of our nation. We will mark it in communities across the country by holding parades on main streets, placing flags on our homes, and lighting up the night sky.

We do this to celebrate everything we love about this country—our rights, our responsibilities, and our commitment to each other. But bound in that, we are celebrating the millions of immigrants who have been the lifeblood of this country. We are celebrating immigrants like Alfred Mullet, the architect of this very room, and Alexander Hamilton, the architect of our economy.

We are celebrating all those men and women who have come to our shores to build better lives for themselves and their families for 237 years. And we are celebrating all of you, not only for what you have given, but for what you will continue to give to this country—a country we all love and whose future we all share.

Thank you everyone, and congratulations. Now, ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand and join me as we recite in unison our Pledge of Allegiance.

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