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American Bar Association Immediate Past President  
Keynote Remarks to  
New Citizens of the United States  
John F. Kennedy Library  
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Good afternoon.

Thank you, Chief Judge Wolf, for your gracious introduction.

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be here, to participate in such an important and exciting event, to welcome you as new citizens of this great country, and to help celebrate the occasion with you and your loved ones.

Let me tell you a story about a young boy.

More than half a century ago, a seven-year old boy born in a small village in Calabria and his family traveled by boat from the port of Naples, Italy, to New York to begin life in America.

At dawn on the day that the ship was about to reach New York Harbor, the boy was already on deck, waiting in the darkness for the sun to rise, excitedly anticipating his first sight of the Statue of Liberty. By the time the boat glided into the Harbor, and the Statue came into view, the eager boy had been joined on deck by many other joyful people, including his family.

All through his life, the boy never forgot his first sight of that magnificent Statue, or his first step on American soil at Ellis Island, nor the thoughts that were in his mind at that moment,

The boy and his family settled in a small town near Chicago, Illinois -- his mother's birthplace -- where he learned to speak a new language, had a wonderful childhood and an excellent public school education, and was admitted to Princeton University with an academic scholarship.

After graduating from Princeton he was a high school English teacher for several years, then attended law school in Boston where he has lived and practiced law since graduating, and helped to raise three wonderful children -- a daughter and two sons.

Ladies and gentlemen, I was that young boy.

I became a lawyer 36 years ago and, as you heard in the introduction, this past year had the honor of serving as president of the 413,000-lawyer American Bar Association, the national representative of the legal profession in America. I have been informed that I am the first ABA president of Italian heritage in the ABA's 130-year history, and the first to be born outside the United States.

My journey from a poor village in Italy to the presidency of the American Bar Association is proof that in America any child who is given the opportunity, and encouragement from family and good people, and with hard work, can accomplish any goal, even an impossible one.

As ABA President I traveled to every part of the United States including forty-seven states, and to thirty countries. I met with hundreds of government leaders in the United States and around the world, and spoke to thousands of persons.

As one who has seen first-hand what life is like in countries that deny freedom and opportunity to their people, and as an immigrant to this country who has much to be thankful for, I know the true meaning of the American promise of "equal opportunity for all."

From personal experience, I know that America is strong because of the talents, and contributions, of *all* who live in this great country. From personal experience, I know how very important it is that *all* people – especially young people -- be given the opportunity to receive an education, to work hard, to develop their abilities, and to contribute to this great nation.

America from its very beginning has been a nation of immigrants.

The hard work, intelligence, and creativity of this country's immigrants-- and that of their sons and daughters and grandchildren-- have built America, and have led America, and they will *continue* to build and lead America, in every field of endeavor.

Never forget that. No one in America should ever forget that.

Just last week, a report entitled "A World of Opportunity" was released by a respected non-profit organization in New York called the Center for an Urban Future. The report discusses how new immigrants to America in recent years have been "giving a huge lift to urban economies and even outpacing self-employed native-born Americans," in cities from Los Angeles to Houston, to New York, and in between. The

Director of the Center said that “immigrants have become a real engine for economic and job growth” throughout the United States.

But that statement has been true of America’s immigrants from the very start of this country.

As a teenager I was inspired forty-six years ago by the inauguration speech of a young, new US President – John F. Kennedy, in whose Memorial Library we are gathered today. He urged Americans to “Ask *not* what your country can do for you, but what *you* can do for your country.”

I urge *you* to ask that same question, not just today, but every day.

President Kennedy, whose great-grandparents immigrated to this country from Ireland, spoke here in his home town of Boston just days prior to delivering his inaugural speech in Washington, DC. He told his fellow Massachusetts citizens that he believed in the principle that, “Of those to whom much is given, much is required.”

I hope that you also will try to live by that principle.

As a lawyer and as ABA president, I have tried to repay my debt of gratitude to America, to help ensure that the promise of “equal opportunity for all” is a promise that we continue to honor for every person – whether they are here by birth or by choice -- as it has been honored since this country was formed more than two centuries ago.

I am proud to be a lawyer because lawyers protect what the Statue of Liberty symbolizes to all people –friend or foe -- throughout the world: freedom; democracy; and the rule of law.

I have urged and will continue to urge all lawyers throughout America, and especially government officials, never to forget that our democracy and our freedom depend on both an *independent judiciary* – on judges who are free from intimidation, influence or threats --and an *independent legal profession* – on lawyers who are not under the control of or threatened by the government, and whose foremost obligation is to protect the people’s rights.

America is the longest lasting and greatest democracy the world has ever known. It survives today because of the rule of law, and because of judges and lawyers and, most important, because of citizens like you, who will fiercely protect the rule of the law.

Quite simply, without an independent judiciary and independent legal profession, and without the vigilant and constant efforts of *all* American citizens, there would be no rule of law, no democracy, and no freedom.

As American citizens you now share a sacred obligation to help protect the rule of law and our democracy from anyone who would harm them, even from well-intentioned but misguided government leaders within our own country. As a US citizen

you have the great power of the vote -- to select who our government leaders should be. Use that power. Never take it for granted.

Freedom and democracy depend on well-educated, engaged, citizens who will guard them with every ounce of their energy. I urge you to keep informed about political events in our country and the world. Think for yourself. Think independently and critically. Always question when you are told that something is in your country's best interests. Speak out to make your views heard. And make your voice heard in the voting booth.

I conclude my remarks with this thought.

It has been a remarkable journey for that young boy who traveled almost 60 years ago from a small village in Italy to America. But each of us here today has made that journey. Indeed, except for the Native American Indians who were here even before the first immigrant came to America, *everyone in America*, or their ancestors, have made the same journey that you and I have made.

It makes no difference whether one or one's family has been here for one generation or many generations – in America we are all immigrants.

And so to those in this country who sometimes forget their origins, and to the members of the US government who are unable to agree on how today's generation of immigrants should be treated, I say this: "Open your arms wide and welcome today's immigrants, as arms were opened wide to your immigrant ancestors --- treat them fairly, with the dignity and caring that was extended to your forebears." That is what helped to make America what it is today. That is what has made America great.

And to you, America's newest citizens, I say this: give back to America, always help those who are in need, and enrich this land by your hard work and your talents, as I am confident you can do, and will do.

My fellow citizens – I congratulate you and welcome you.

You have my very best wishes.