

U.S. District Court Naturalization Ceremony

Governor Laura Kelly Keynote Address

Johnson County Community College

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Judge Robinson, for that introduction, and for presiding over this very special event. I'm honored to be a part of it.

I want to begin by congratulating everyone here today who is becoming a citizen of the United States of America and of our great State of Kansas. This is a remarkable achievement, and you should have a deep sense of pride in the hard work, determination, and perseverance that's brought you to this moment.

Like most people in the United States, I come from a family of immigrants. I myself am only a second-generation American.

All four of my grandparents emigrated to the United States looking for a better life, the same way millions of other people did and still do.

They left their home in Ireland, arrived at Ellis Island in the New York Harbor, set down roots... and gave their children, grandchildren, and future generations the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Now, you're doing the same for yourselves and your families.

I know that, as part of your preparation to take your oath of citizenship, you've learned a lot about the history, geography, laws, and values of the United States. So, what does it mean to be a U.S. Citizen?

The United States is often described as a "melting pot." Our country would not be what it is today were it not for the ways it's been shaped and influenced by people who've come here from all around the world—bringing their language, food, and cultural traditions with them. There is so much beautiful diversity all around the country, and all around Kansas.

Our diversity is what makes us strong, and is something to be celebrated. It's what makes us unique.

Though we may come from different backgrounds, honor different traditions, and observe different holidays, we are all citizens of this great country.

And, as we embrace and celebrate our rich diversity, we all have a responsibility to recognize that, for all the many ways we are different, there are so many more ways in which we are alike.

Each one of you has had a unique journey to get to this point, but now you will be tied together as Americans... compatriots.

So again, what does it mean to be a citizen of the United States? If you ask 100 different people that question, you'll get 100 different answers.

But one value that I think many of us hold dear is a sense of community, a willingness to help our neighbors and serve our country in some way.

We want to pursue our passions and our dreams, work hard, and make contributions that will benefit ourselves, our families, and our communities.

For me, and for many others, that means looking out for those among us who are most vulnerable. It means pursuing happiness—one of our inalienable rights enshrined in our Constitution—in ways that also take into account the happiness and well-being of others.

Every one of you will eventually decide for yourselves, if you haven't already, what it means to be a citizen of the United States. But you have already made great contributions to your communities and our society.

When you took the Oath of Allegiance a few moments ago and officially became U.S. citizens, you guaranteed yourselves the rights and protections afforded to you by the Constitution.

You committed to protecting and defending those rights—for yourselves and others.

That's a commitment that I personally take very seriously. You have my word that, as your Governor, I will do everything in my power to advocate for every Kansan in every corner of the state, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual identity, or country of origin.

I will continue to call out and condemn racism, discrimination, and any rhetoric or behavior rooted in prejudice whenever, wherever I see it.

We are all Kansans, and we are all Americans—and we all deserve to be treated equally under our Constitution.

The main goal of my second term as Governor is to make Kansas the best place to live, work, and raise a family. That goes for all families.

I'm proud that we are living in a moment of historic economic growth, and the only way we're going to keep bringing new jobs and opportunities to Kansas is to grow our workforce and welcome people of all different backgrounds to our state.

So, welcome! Thank you for choosing to make Kansas your home, and congratulations on becoming citizens of the United States of America.