

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF WYOMING

In the Matter of the
Naturalization and Granting of
United States Citizenship to:

Casper, Wyoming
September 13, 2021
3:42 p.m.

SUNG-YEAH JUNG; PAULINA SWAN;
SINTIA MARCELA MEZA; DARIO
GRANA; SENSAITIENG CLARK; SEI
HYUN SARAH SCHRACK; OLEG IVANOV;
MARIA MARTHA ELIZALDE DE SWASEY;
MARIA CARMEN ROBINSON; MARCEL
VAN DEN BRINK; OKSANA
ALEXANDROVNA AYCOCK; ZHIRU
HUANG; THUY T. LUYEN; EMMA
CONCEPCION SANTOS COOK; REGINE
MARIE LUCAS SMITH; KEISHA ANN
MARIE SANDERSON TREASURE,

Ewing T. Kerr
Federal Courthouse

Petitioners.

TRANSCRIPT OF HEARING ON PETITIONS FOR
UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION CEREMONY
BEFORE THE HONORABLE SCOTT W. SKAVDAHL
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

APPEARANCES:

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computer-aided transcription.*

(Proceedings commenced at 3:42 p.m., September 13, 2021.)

THE COURT: Thank you. Please be seated. And since I can socially distance, ladies and gentlemen, and it's difficult for me to pronounce and say things, I'm going to take my mask off. If you can socially distance and are vaccinated, you may do the same, but you may also leave them on.

Let us first note, good afternoon. Welcome to the Ewing T. Kerr Federal Courthouse. The Court will suspend all rules on cameras and recording devices, but I'd ask if you have a cell phone, if you please make sure it's on silent so that we don't interrupt the proceedings.

It is a tradition at beginning of these naturalization ceremonies to recognize those citizens and families of those citizens who have paid the ultimate price in defending what so many in this world seek: the freedoms and benefits of becoming a United States citizen.

As of this morning, 7,074 American men and women have been killed in action while involved in military operations in the Middle East. In addition, 53,313 United States military personnel have been wounded in action during these military operations.

As you may be aware, on Thursday, August 26, 13 U.S. servicemen and women were killed when a suicide bomber detonated explosives at the Kabul airport gate where they were

assisting evacuees rushing to depart Afghanistan for safer haven. Those members are:

Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover; Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario; Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole Gee; Marine Corps Cpl. Hunter Lopez; Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page; Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto Sanchez; Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza; Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared Schmitz; Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee McCollum of Jackson, Wyoming; Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan Merola; Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem Nikoui; Navy Hospitalman Maxton Soviak; and Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss.

Let us take a moment of silence and recognize these American heroes and their families whose sacrifice cannot be measured and whose loss will never be recovered.

(Moment of silence.)

THE COURT: Thank you. The United States District Court for the District of Wyoming is in Special Session for the naturalization of foreign nationals to be United States citizens. It is with great honor, pride, and privilege that I'm able to conduct today's ceremony naturalizing 16 new U.S. citizens from 11 different countries around the world.

The Federal District Court of Wyoming, including Judges Johnson and Freudenthal, extend their congratulations to you, your families and friends.

I'd ask at this time if the Deputy Clerk of Court

would make a roll call of prospective applicants for U.S. citizenship, and if you could please raise your hand when your name is called so that we can verify everyone is here.

THE COURTROOM DEPUTY: Sung-Yeah Jung, Paulina Swan, Sintia Marcela Meza, Dario Grana, Sengsaitieng Clark, Sei Hyun Sarah Schrack, Oleg Ivanov, Maria Martha Elizalde De Swasey, Maria Carmen Robinson, Marcel Van Den Brink, Oksana Alexandrovna Aycock, Zhiru Huang, Thuy T. Luyen, Emma Concepcion Santos Cook, Regine Marie Lucas Smith, Keisha Ann Marie Sanderson Treasure.

THE COURT: All right. All applicants are accounted for.

One of the most fundamental acts that we do as citizens is pledge our allegiance to the flag of the United States. Recent events have caused that pledge to take on a renewed spirit and meaning. And at this time, I would ask if we could please have the assistance of Timothy -- and I apologize -- Joshua, Zachary, and Nathaniel Schrack as well as Delphina, Stephanie, and Jenny Meza.

If you would come forward and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance, and if you could please rise.

(Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.)

THE COURT: And if you could please remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance [sic].

(Singing "The Star-Spangled Banner.")

THE COURT: Thank you, and thank you for assisting us. You may be seated.

At this time, the Court would recognize Mr. David Kubichek, representing the Attorney General of the United States, for a petition.

MR. KUBICHEK: May it please the Court.

THE COURT: Counsel.

MR. KUBICHEK: Before the Court today, Your Honor, are individuals here for a hearing on their petitions for naturalization. Each of these prospective citizens has successfully completed all of the steps necessary for eligibility for United States citizenship.

Moreover, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service has completed its processes with respect to each of these individuals, including the necessary background investigations.

Having successfully negotiated all of these hurdles, Your Honor, we are advised that each of them is well-qualified to be admitted to citizenship. Therefore, the United States hereby moves the Court to admit each of these individuals to United States citizenship upon their taking of the required oath.

THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Kubichek. On the petition of the United States, the Court finds that each of the applicants identified has satisfied the legal requirements to

become citizens of the United States of America and,
therefore, grants the petition and will enter an order
allowing these petitioners to become United States citizens.

At this time, subject to the taking of their oath --
and if you would all rise at this time and raise your hand and
repeat after me.

I, state your name --

THE PETITIONERS: I, (stating names) --

THE COURT: -- hereby declare, on oath --

THE PETITIONERS: -- hereby declare, on oath.

THE COURT: -- that I absolutely and entirely --

THE PETITIONERS: -- that I absolutely and
entirely --

THE COURT: -- renounce and abjure --

THE PETITIONERS: -- renounce and abjure --

THE COURT: -- all allegiance and fidelity --

THE PETITIONERS: -- all allegiance and fidelity --

THE COURT: -- to any foreign prince or potentate --

THE PETITIONERS: -- to any foreign prince or
potentate --

THE COURT: -- state or sovereignty --

THE PETITIONERS: -- state or sovereignty --

THE COURT: -- of whom or which --

THE PETITIONERS: -- of whom or which --

THE COURT: -- I have heretofore been --

THE PETITIONERS: -- I have heretofore been --

THE COURT: -- a subject or citizen --

THE PETITIONERS: -- a subject or citizen --

THE COURT: -- that I will support and defend --

THE PETITIONERS: -- that I will support and
defend --

THE COURT: -- the Constitution and laws of the
United States of America --

THE PETITIONERS: -- the Constitution and laws of the
United States of America --

THE COURT: -- against all enemies --

THE PETITIONERS: -- against all enemies --

THE COURT: -- foreign and domestic --

THE PETITIONERS: -- foreign and domestic --

THE COURT: -- that I will bear true faith --

THE PETITIONERS: -- that I will bear true faith --

THE COURT: -- and allegiance to the same --

THE PETITIONERS: -- and allegiance to the same --

THE COURT: -- that I will bear arms on behalf --

THE PETITIONERS: -- that I will bear arms on
behalf --

THE COURT: -- of the United States when required by
law.

THE PETITIONERS: -- of the United States when
required by law.

THE COURT: -- I take this obligation freely --

THE PETITIONERS: -- I take this obligation freely --

THE COURT: -- without any mental reservation --

THE PETITIONERS: -- without any mental
reservation --

THE COURT: -- or purpose of evasion --

THE PETITIONERS: -- or purpose of evasion --

THE COURT: -- so help me God.

THE PETITIONERS: -- so help me God.

THE COURT: Congratulations. Please join me in
welcoming our newest U.S. citizens.

(Applause.)

THE COURT: We are going to hand out the
certificates. And if you -- family and friends, if you want
to get a better location so you can take a picture, you're
welcome to do so.

(Certificates presented by the Court.)

THE COURT: Thank you. Please be seated.

It is very awkward, various traditions that we have,
to shake hands and whatnot, so I extend to you a socially
distanced handshake and congratulations, you and your family
and friends, for becoming United States citizens.

You also received, with the certificates, letters by
our congressional delegation. In those letters, you'll see
the various contact individuals that represent you on behalf

of the Congress of the United States.

So please, if you have questions, if you have concerns, if you have comments as to their job performance, by all means, you are encouraged not only to communicate with them but to exercise the most important right that you have gained, and that is the right to vote and speak in terms of who is elected and who represents you.

I would, at this time, congratulate you, your families and friends, and note that we contemplated during this pandemic time to continue these programs. But frankly, you've waited long enough, and there's enough anxiety in this world. We can eliminate one of those anxieties, and that is to allow you to become U.S. citizens and complete this process. So we've gone forward and done this sooner than later.

And at this time, I would recognize Mr. David Kubichek for some short comments on behalf of the Attorney General of the United States.

MR. KUBICHEK: Thank you, each of you. You honor us by your work and effort, sacrifice to become fellow citizens of ours. Most of us here won the birth lottery. We were just born here. We didn't have to do anything except grow up. You all had to get here, and then you had to take the test and study and pass exams and pass background checks and go through an elaborate process to determine whether you were fit

candidates to be a member of our country as full voting members, as citizens.

That is an effort. That's a lot of work. And that you went to that work to be a part of us is really an honor to all of us here. So on behalf of the Attorney General, I want to thank you.

On Friday, we celebrate the 232nd anniversary of the Constitution of the United States, which is, of course, the framework upon which all that happens here is undertaken. It describes the rights that we all have under the Constitution: the right to vote; the right to practice our religion or not practice any religion; the right to love who we want to love; the right to vote.

And it also imports a number of obligations that you have as citizens. You know, you've got to pay taxes now. You probably did anyway, but now you really do. We follow up, so welcome to that.

Now and again, one of you may be called as jurors to come down here and act as judges, because our system is different than a lot of places. Judge Skavdahl, in a trial, especially a criminal trial, decides what the law is; and he instructs our jurors as to the law to apply. But you-all, as jurors, would decide the facts and, applying the judge's instructions to those facts, whether somebody would be convicted or not convicted. And we would have to prove their

guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, which is an incredibly high standard.

But we leave that to you, because that's an essential part of a free society. We don't let the government, we don't let me or my people decide if you go to jail or not. We don't let him (indicating) decide. You guys, you guys get the ultimate thumb's up or thumb's down. That's one of the most essential parts of how we live here.

And there, of course, are other obligations we all have that are kind of inherent in being a citizen -- and some of us practice these better than others -- but the right to freedom of speech and expression also implies a certain willingness and tolerance to not interfere with someone else's right to express and speak. And that's all part of what's required to be good citizens, as well: tolerance, understanding.

Our country that you're now official members of -- and if you look at each other, you're not the same, you know. You have different backgrounds, different religions, different races. You come from different heritages and traditions. All of that's different. And one of the things that makes us a little unique as a country is we don't have common religions or common heritages or any of that stuff. We have an agreement that's embodied in the Constitution, an agreement that says we're going to abide collectively by certain

principles. And that's the only thing that holds us together is our willingness to abide by that agreement.

So it takes effort, and it's not easy. But -- and it's easy to get, you know, sort of concerned. You look at the news, and it looks like everybody's mad, you know, yelling at each other. Don't want to wear a mask. Got to wear masks. Don't want to be vaccinated. Got to be vaccinated. Don't like your race. Don't like this. Don't like that. We're mad.

And it's easy to look at that and think, Well, heck. Everybody's mad. How do we get through this? Well, you know, the most important thing to think about in terms of that is, you know, squeaky wheels get the most attention. Most of us, by a huge margin, just want to raise our kids, get them to school, get a breakfast in their tummies, pick them up at the end of the day, love our spouse, love our families, be good citizens, be kind and tolerant of each other. That's what 98 percent of us want.

But, you know, the news is a 24-hour news cycle. It's got to have something to talk about. And the more exciting it is, the more they're going to cover it. So don't get discouraged. Most of us aren't the loud voices protesting and jumping up and down all the time.

We vote. Not enough of us, you know. The big election last year, you know, somewhere around the high

50-percent mark I think actually voted of people who are eligible. I don't know why that is, but the good citizen goes out and thinks about it and votes. So do that.

And in becoming Americans here, don't offload all that you had before. Don't offload your traditions and your cultures and all of that, because your coming here and sharing all of that with us makes us stronger, makes us better, you know.

So -- and be involved. If you've got kids, be involved in their school, you know. Get involved in some community activities. Little things make us better, you know. It doesn't always have to be a grand gesture or a big thing.

So I am hopeful that we can continue what Lincoln said in one of his addresses at Gettysburg. There was a question whether a country that was established in liberty, dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, can long survive, can we make it. If that's what's binding us together, those common understandings, then that's it. You know, we've done it for 232 years. Let's try to keep that going. Let's get another couple hundred under our belt.

You guys can help us do that. I know you will because you've already shown us that you're dedicated and you care and you're willing to participate in our country. And for that, as I said initially, we are very honored and very grateful for you to have confidence and faith in us that we

are a good place to be.

So best of luck. Have a great tour as citizens of the United States, and we hope to see some of you down here sitting in those boxes when we're trying some cases, because your perspective, your observations would be valuable. So thank you again. Welcome.

THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Kubichek.

One of the other traditions that we have done here is I like to take a moment and allow you to tell us if you have anyone accompanying you here today, who those people are, and one of the things that's the most exciting thing about becoming a U.S. citizen. You don't have to make a long speech, but just what makes today special for you and/or your family.

And with that, we would start with Ms. Jung. And where are you coming from in Wyoming today?

MS. JUNG: I'm from South Korea like ten years ago, and I live in Colorado for nine year, and I moved to here one year. I really like it because my husband got a job in airport. And I didn't know Wyoming. I never thought about it, but it's really great place. And I think among the 50 state, Wyoming is the only state have a good opportunity to put my dream and my future. So I'm so exciting. So thank you so much.

THE COURT: Thank you. And do you have anyone here

today with you?

MS. JUNG: My husband. But I thought he cannot come inside, so he's waiting at the parking lot. Yeah.

THE COURT: All right. Well, thank you, and welcome to Wyoming.

Ms. Swan.

MS. SWAN: I'm sorry. I'm very excited today.

THE COURT: That's great.

MS. SWAN: I feel very happy because I'm a citizen, too. And I live in Rawlins, Wyoming. It's very nice place. Wyoming -- I love Wyoming. And coming with me, my husband and my friends Antonia and Wayne. That's all.

THE COURT: Congratulations.

MS. SWAN: Thank you very much.

THE COURT: Thank you.

MS. MEZA: I'm nervous. I'm very excited.

THE COURT: That's all right.

MS. MEZA: So I'm Sintia. My house is here in Casper. I have tres kids, tres girls. This is my husband, Joseph. And thank you so much.

THE COURT: Well, thank you, and thank you for your girls assisting us with the Pledge of Allegiance.

MR. GRANA: Hi, everybody. I'm Dario Grana. I'm originally from Italy. I live in Laramie, Wyoming. I moved here in 2013. I'm a professor at the University of Wyoming.

I always wanted to work in academia, so I'm grateful that I had the chance here in the United States.

THE COURT: What subject do you teach?

MR. GRANA: Geoscience.

THE COURT: All right. Well, congratulations. You've got a great state to find some geoscience.

MR. GRANA: Yep. It's the right place. Thank you.

THE COURT: Thank you.

MS. CLARK: I'm from Cambodia. I come live Wyoming. I'm so excited. I have one daughter. She goes to school. Thank you so much. (Inaudible.)

THE COURT: Thank you. Congratulations.

MS. SCHRACK: I'm here with my family, my husband and my four boys and one girl. And I'm very excited that I get to vote this next election. And I love the freedom that America has, because I home-school my kids, and some of my kids go to a private school, but -- yes. I love Casper. I love the people here, and I love everything except the wind.

THE COURT: You're not alone. Congratulations. Thank you. Thanks for having your children assist us.

MR. IVANOV: My name is Oleg. I'm originally from Ukraine. I've been in this country for more than 20 years. It's been a long trip. Here in Casper about 10 years. I'm a doctor. This country gave me all kinds of opportunities, and this is the logical conclusion of this long trip.

THE COURT: Congratulations, and thanks for being willing to take it.

MS. DE SWASEY: My name is Martha, and I'm from Mexico. I have been in the United States for over 50 years. I'm just thankful the United States gave me the opportunity to be a United States citizen.

I had applied three different occasions, and they returned my application. I started out when it was only \$99. And the third time that they refused my application, I said, Why do I want to be part of this country? They don't want me to.

We moved to Wyoming and -- 11 years ago. We live in Thermopolis, and we love it, and we don't want to move from here. Finally, last year I applied, and then the pandemic, and here I am. Thank you, and I'm very happy.

THE COURT: Congratulations. And thank you for your persistence. Who all is here with you?

MS. DE SWASEY: Oh. And my husband is here.

MS. ROBINSON: Hi. My name is Carmen from Mexico, and I live in Sheridan. Moved here 30 years ago. Have four kids. The best place to raise kids, by the way. I love Sheridan.

And thank you for your speech. That was great. And thank you for the opportunity to be a citizen. I'm going to try my best.

THE COURT: Thank you for wanting to be.
Congratulations.

MR. VAN DEN BRINK: Hi. I'm Marcelo. I'm from Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I met my wife in Wyoming about 20 years ago when I was working as an engineer. And I live in Riverton. I love the freedom here and the hunting, of course. So I love it here. I don't want to go away from here anymore.

THE COURT: Well, congratulations. Hunting season's about to begin.

MS. AYCOCK: Hello. I'm Oksana, and I came here from Moscow, Russia, eight years ago because I got married to a wonderful man, and we live in Riverton, Wyoming. It is his hometown, and we raise a wonderful, beautiful baby girl. They're waiting for me in the parking lot because it is naptime, and the baby is fussy. So -- and I'm happy to be here finally. I got it. Thank you.

THE COURT: Congratulations.

MS. AYCOCK: Thank you.

MS. HUANG: My name is Zhiru. Original I'm from China, and I moved to Wyoming from 2014. And I raise my kids, and we do business here near Yellowstone. And we love Wyoming. And also, some year, we more like a snowbird. We go back to the South, and then we come back, you know, most of the time here in Wyoming.

And one of the reason applying for the citizenship, I would like to vote for next president election. If possible, I want to vote Trump next time. Thank you.

THE COURT: You're welcome. Thank you.

MS. LUYEN: Hi. Good afternoon. I am Thuy Luyen. I'm really happy today. Thank you so much for everything.

THE COURT: Congratulations.

MS. LUYEN: Thank you.

MS. COOK: My name is Emma, and I'm so happy that I be here. And I've been here in Wyoming -- this is the first state that I've been through. And I've been here for almost 14 years, and this is the place that -- it seems like there's no place like home. People are friendly and respectful, and I have a good opportunity here, and thank you.

THE COURT: Congratulations. It's good to hear.

MS. SMITH: My name's Regine. I came from the Philippines, and I came from there and straight to Casper, Wyoming. So the culture shock was unreal. But after being here for over ten years, I came to love this place. It actually grew on me. Not the wind, but -- I'm still not used to it.

I love this place, and I'm happy I became a citizen because it gave me the two most important things in my life. One of them is my career as a nurse, and the second one is my husband, who is with me, and our son, who is four years old.

THE COURT: Congratulations.

MS. SMITH: Thank you.

MS. TREASURE: Hi, everyone. I'm Keisha. I'm Jamaican. The most important thing is I'm now a citizen, and now I can have my son here with me from Jamaica. I'm here because America provide a great opportunity for us, and it got really hard sometime in Jamaica. It's very emotional right now.

So thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

THE COURT: Thank you for wanting to take it.

It is always reassuring to those of us that have been gifted with the opportunity to be citizens to hear from you-- all who have worked for it and have desired and gained the opportunity and how much you are grateful and emotional to have that opportunity, and I hope that's always the case.

Events of the last year and of the last three weeks -- Saturday, the 20th anniversary of the attack on America -- have only served to strengthen the reality that the freedoms and rights we enjoy as United States citizens cannot be taken for granted or assumed a given.

Less we stand silent and fail to exercise our rights to vote, to support our Constitution and recognize that it is we, the people, who must exercise, support, and defend our rights, we run the risk of extinction just like any other government. Our Constitution is simply a paper document.

Without people abiding by the agreement, believing in and defending it, it is valueless.

Thank you for wanting to become a part of this incredible country. And while we certainly are not perfect, for over 231 years -- 32 in a few more days -- it has provided a sanctuary for freedom and served as an incubator for the opportunity and advancement of all.

With your energy, skills, and talents, I encourage you to make us a more diverse and talented country and democracy. Vote. Exercise your rights and freedoms, but appreciate and respect the divergent view and beliefs that make this country what it is.

This is the greatest nation on earth, but to remain, so we must appreciate how and why we enjoy the rights we do. It is not because we all think and believe the same, but rather because we respect each other's diversity of beliefs which allows we, the people, to govern.

You are now part of us, that richly woven fabric of America. We do not exist as individuals but as a collection of many united to form a more perfect union. May it always be that way, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

Congratulations. We'll stand in recess.

(Proceedings concluded at 4:20 p.m., September 13, 2021.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, MEGAN E. STRAWN, Court Reporter in the state of Wyoming, a Registered Professional Reporter and Certified Realtime Reporter, do hereby certify that I reported by machine shorthand the proceedings contained herein on the aforementioned subject on the date herein set forth, and that the foregoing 22 pages constitute a full, true, and correct transcript.

Dated this 14th day of September 2021.

/s/ Megan E. Strawn

MEGAN E. STRAWN
Registered Professional Reporter
Certified Realtime Reporter