

GOOD AFTERNOON, EVERYONE!

RANDY, THANK YOU FOR THAT INTRODUCTION.

YOUR EXCELLENCY (ARCHBISHOP THOMAS WENSKI), IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU HERE THIS AFTERNOON.

DIRECTOR GONZALEZ, MY THANKS TO YOU AND YOUR STAFF FOR GRACIOUSLY HOSTING US AT MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT'S A PLEASURE TO BE HERE THIS AFTERNOON FOR THE LAUNCH OF CITIZENSHIP 1-2-3.

CITIZENSHIP 1-2-3 IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT TOOL FOR HELPING OUR COMMUNITY BETTER UNDERSTAND THE OFTEN-COMPLEX NATURALIZATION PROCESS. AND THIS INITIATIVE GREATLY COMPLEMENTS THE WORK MIAMI-DADE IS DOING TO MAKE THE PATH TO RESIDENCY EASIER FOR HARD-WORKING IMMIGRANTS IN OUR COMMUNITY.

AMONG THE MANY WAYS MIAMI-DADE IS HELPING OUR LEGAL RESIDENTS NATURALIZE IS THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS. LAST YEAR, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY WAS THE FIRST COUNTY IN THE COUNTRY TO PARTNER WITH CITI'S "CITIES FOR CITIZENSHIP."

WE KNOW THAT HAVING ACCESS TO THE PROPER RESOURCES AND TOOLS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE, AND THAT'S WHY INITIATIVES LIKE CITIES FOR CITIZENSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP 1-2-3 ARE SO IMPORTANT TO MIAMI-DADE COUNTY. MORE THAN HALF OF OUR 2.6 MILLION RESIDENTS WERE BORN OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES.

IN FACT, MIAMI-DADE IS HOME TO NEARLY HALF-A-MILLION LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENTS WHO MAY BE ELIGIBLE TO NATURALIZE. THAT'S MORE THAN 19 PERCENT OF OUR POPULATION.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT CITIZENSHIP NOT ONLY BENEFITS IMMIGRANTS, BUT IT ALSO BENEFITS THE COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY LIVE.

EVENTS LIKE THIS REMIND ME OF A DAY ABOUT 40 YEARS AGO, IN JANUARY OF 1976, WHEN I BECAME A U.S. CITIZEN. I ARRIVED HERE IN 1960 FROM CUBA.

AND BECAUSE I WASN'T BORN HERE, I HAD TO GO THROUGH THE NATURALIZATION PROCESS -- WHICH I WAS VERY HAPPY TO DO.

I'M PROOF THAT THROUGH HARD WORK, PERSEVERANCE AND STUDY, YOU CAN MAKE IT HERE IN AMERICA IF YOU'RE WILLING TO TRY!

LOOK, I'M THE MAYOR OF THIS COUNTY -- THE MOST POPULOUS COUNTY IN FLORIDA. AND WHAT OTHER PLACE IN THE WORLD COULD YOU HAVE AN IMMIGRANT COME AT SEVEN YEARS OLD...NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH...AND END UP BECOMING THE MAYOR OF A MAJOR TOWN OR COUNTY?

THAT'S THE KIND OF OPPORTUNITY THAT ONLY AMERICA PROVIDES.

I LOVE MY COUNTRY, AS WE ALL DO! THE U.S. HAS GIVEN ME EVERYTHING THAT I'VE EVER WISHED FOR...EVERYTHING THAT I'VE EVER HOPED FOR. AND MANY OF US HERE TODAY HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE BENEFITS OF U.S. CITIZENSHIP ARE TREMENDOUS FOR NOT ONLY THE INDIVIDUALS WHO NATURALIZE, BUT ALSO FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND NATION AS A WHOLE.

IN FACT, RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PERMANENT RESIDENTS WHO BECOME U.S. CITIZENS RECEIVE AN AVERAGE 11 PERCENT BOOST IN PERSONAL INCOME AS A RESULT OF BETTER ACCESS TO JOBS, BENEFITS AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

IN OTHER WORDS, BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN MEANS BETTER OPPORTUNITIES -- AND OF COURSE, IT ALSO COMES WITH THE HONOR OF BECOMING A CITIZEN OF THE GREATEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD -- THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA!

I HOPE ALL ELIGIBLE MIAMI-DADE RESIDENTS WILL TAKE THE FINAL STEP TO CITIZENSHIP WITH THE HELP OF THE RESOURCES WE'RE LAUNCHING TODAY.

THANK YOU AGAIN, EVERYONE, FOR BEING HERE WITH US AT M.I.A. THIS AFTERNOON.

MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS THESE UNITED STATES AND MIAMI-DADE COUNTY!

