

Expedited Citizenship for Immigrant Soldiers: Tribute or Bounty?

Gabrielle Malfatti-Rachell, Assistant Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies, Lincoln University of Missouri

The post 9/11 era has been marked by heightened anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States as revealed by a 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center¹ in which 53% of the public said they believed illegal immigrants should be mandated to return to their native countries. The results of the survey also revealed that the public does not favor maintaining current levels of legal immigration, 37% favored keeping with present level and 40% declared it should be reduced. The period following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon coincides with the War on Terror.

In the context of war, there is one group of immigrants that is commonly embraced by the public regardless of their immigration status: Foreign-born Soldiers serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. In the last six years, the White House, Congress, the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security have implemented policies to expedite the naturalization process of eligible servicemen and women. Yet, some contend that most of these soldiers are only truly embraced by the public after they have sacrificed life or limb for their adoptive country. With the backdrop of negative attitudes toward immigrants following the attacks of September 11, 2001, granting citizenship to fallen soldiers is often perceived by their surviving relatives as hypocritical on the part of the government; "on one side, they're sending them to war. On the other, they want higher fences on the border so Mexicans don't come."²

According to a report by Jeanne Batalova³ of the Migration Policy Institute, there are currently over 65,000 foreign-born individuals serving in the U.S. Armed Services. The presence of foreign-born Soldiers in the U.S. military creates a convergence of human migration and national interests that forces us to look at immigration and citizenship through different lenses than those most commonly employed by policy makers and the media. At play are, the definition - or redefinition - of citizenship, the role of the U.S. military as an agent of social change, and the development of immigration policies informed by honest appraisals of the needs and desires of immigrants and the American socio-economic system.

Foreign-born soldiers have served with distinction in every American armed conflict since the Revolutionary War. In most instances, people agree that the mere willingness to die for the country warrants the efforts of streamlining the naturalization process for those who serve honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces⁴ but were born on foreign soil and are categorized as immigrants by the definitions contained in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)⁵. Nonetheless, others warn of the dangers of presenting citizenship as a bounty thus creating an

¹ America's Immigration Quandary, March 30, 2006. Retrieved from <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/274.pdf> on August 14, 2008.

² Michael Riley, Immigrants' sacrifices honored posthumously, *The Denver Post*, May 30, 2005. Retrieved from http://www.wkconline.org/resources/word/Riley-Citizen_Soldiers.doc. (14 August 2008). Mr. Riley is quoting Simona Garibay, whose son, Jose Angel, died in Nasiriyah, Iraq on March 23, 2003.

³ Jeanne Batalova. Immigrants in the US Armed Forces. 15 May 2008. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/print.cfm?ID=683> (24 July 2008).

⁴ Emilio T. González. Hearing on Contributions of Immigrants to the U.S. Military. A statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services. 10 July 2006. Retrieved from http://www.uscis.gov/files/testimony/mil_natz_060710.pdf (7 June 2008).

⁵ The Immigration and Nationality Act passed in 1952 and amended in 1965 and 1990 is codified in 8 U.S.C

Army of mercenaries⁶ or a disguised draft aimed at non citizens, a vulnerable sector in American society.⁷

For the purpose of this paper, the terms immigrant, non-citizen, and foreign-born will be used interchangeably to denote those Soldiers who were born in a country other than the United States and who enlisted in the Armed Services prior to filing for naturalization.

Citizenship and Military Service

In the United States, citizenship has been traditionally tied to the birth right principles of *Jus sanguinis*—blood right—or *Jus soli*—land right. The first acknowledges one’s lineage and the second the geographic location of one’s birth. For those who were not born in the territory belonging to the United States nor to an American parent, the law affords the possibility of becoming a citizen that as first proposed in 1790 was very closely tied to the principle of *Jus soli* in that it required permanent presence in the land for a given period of time.⁸ Wong and Cho (2006)⁹ propose that the criteria for adjudicating citizenship and nationality through naturalization is now marked by a third guiding principle which the authors address as *Jus Meritum*; citizenship acquired in exchange for service, more specifically, military service. This being the case, Wong (2007) raises the concern that in allowing non-citizens to risk their lives for the country the nation is indeed changing the paradigm in which “duties follow citizenship”(p. 167).

There is a long standing tradition of military service as a path toward U.S. citizenship¹⁰ and the criteria for it is codified in sections 328 and 329 of the INA. Like all other immigrants seeking citizenship by naturalization, members of the Armed Forces must demonstrate good moral character, knowledge of the English language, knowledge of U.S government and history, and allegiance to the Constitution of the United States.

According to section 328 of the INA, under normal circumstances, an immigrant using his/her military service as a path to citizenship must have served honorably for at least one year, be a lawful permanent resident and file his/her application while in the service or within six months of being discharged.¹¹

Section 329¹² of the INA applies to immigrants who seek their citizenship having had served during times of armed conflict. The codified periods are WWI, WWII, The Korean conflicts and Vietnam. The executive branch has the power to designate, by Presidential Executive Order, any other period for this purpose. This section of the INA applies to those who

⁶ Amaya 2007, Wong 2007, and Wong & Cho, 2006

⁷ In addition to the authors listed, the possibility of expedited citizenship as a covert draft has been the subject of blogs by Jorge Mariscal and Daniel González.

⁸ The first naturalization act was passed by congress on March 26, 1790. It required two years of residence in the jurisdiction and it was limited to free, white, adult men of women who were of good moral character and took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution.

⁹ Cara Wong and Grace Cho. (2007). *Jus Meritus: Citizenship for Service*. In Transforming politics, transforming America: The political and civil incorporation of immigrants in the United States. Taeku Lee, Karthrick Ramakrishnan & Ricardo Martínez (Eds.) University of Virginia Press.

¹⁰ Following WWI, on May 9, 1918 congress passed an act (40 Stat.542) allowing alien servicemen to apply for expedited citizenship, waiving the 5 year residency requirement for a three year period of enlistment, and making military personnel exempt to file a declaration of intention.

¹¹ 8 U.S.C [section] 1439

¹² 8 U.S.C [section] 1440

have served honorably for at least one day during an authorized period of conflict, who at the time of enlistment, reenlistment, extension of enlistment or induction were in the United States, a qualifying territory or aboard a vessel owned or operated by the U.S. for non-commercial service. These applicants need not have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence¹³, but may have acquired their lawful residency following enlistment. Such is the case of Pfc. Rudolph Foliwe¹⁴ who arrived in Boston from his native Cameroon on July 7, 2007 and shipped off to basic training on October 18, 2007. Foliwe will be applying for citizenship at the end of September 2008. A person filing under subsection 329(a) “may be naturalized regardless of age, and notwithstanding the provisions of section 328 as they relate to deportability and the provisions of section 331.”¹⁵ The residency and physical presence requirements are waived for these applicants as are all filing charges. On July 3, 2002, President George W. Bush through Executive Order 13,269 identified the period following September 11, 2001 as an authorized period of conflict hence “granting expedited citizenship consideration to non-citizen members of the United States military serving in active duty during the war on terrorism.”¹⁶

Since September 2001 and as of May 2008, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) had processed 39,827 applications for members of the U.S. Armed Forces. In the U.S, USCIS does not hold naturalization ceremonies specific to members of the military; however, in October 2004, USCIS hosted the first overseas military naturalization ceremony since the Korean War. Following that date, over 5,400 Servicemen have been naturalized in ceremonies held in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and in the Pacific aboard the USS Kitty Hawk.¹⁷

The U.S. Department of Defense and USCIS have taken extraordinary measures to streamline the process for members of the military including the creation of a specialized unit at the Nebraska Service Center where all up-front processing of military naturalization takes place.¹⁸ On May 1, 2006, USCIS began a collaborative effort with the FBI through which Servicemen are able to sign a Privacy Act Statement and Release Authorization Form to provide explicit consent to the use of the fingerprints they provided at the time they enlisted instead of having to provide a new set at one of the Application Support Centers.¹⁹ For domestic applicants, reaching the centers throughout the United States is cumbersome given their limited locations. For deployed Soldiers, this obstacle was often insurmountable and led to lengthy delays in the approval of their applications. In 2004, Congress signed into law measures that provided authorization to conduct naturalization proceedings overseas and reduced the required period of

¹³ Although Army recruiters and other enlisting personnel are instructed to ask for proof of legal residency, in fact Section 329 permits the Services to enlist non-resident aliens when their enlistment is considered a benefit to the country’s National security.

¹⁴ Lyndsy Dransfield, Face of Defense: Former African Pastor Serves as Soldier, Cook, *Defense Link*, 15 September 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=51178>. 16 September 2008 - Ftc. Foliwe is a former pastor who at the age of 33 travelled to the United States and within months enlisted in the Army. He currently serves as a Soldier and a cook in Baghdad.

¹⁵ 8 U.S.C [section] 1442

¹⁶ Exec. Order No. 13,269,67 Fed. Reg. 45,287(July 8, 2002).

¹⁷ USCIS personal communication Sarah T. Taylor. July 18, 2008

¹⁸ Emilio T. González. Hearing on Contributions of Immigrants to the U.S. Military. A statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services. 10 July 2006. Retrieved from http://www.uscis.gov/files/testimony/mil_natz_060710.pdf (7 June 2008).

¹⁹ Emilio T. González.

peacetime service from three years to one year and made it retroactive to September 11, 2001. In the same law, Congress waived all naturalization fees for members of the military. On October 1, 2004, the first overseas military naturalization ceremony since the Korean War was held in Afghanistan. Soldiers who file for naturalization while deployed may qualify for leave for all events related to his/her naturalization, including the ceremony.²⁰ Congress also granted immigration benefits to the surviving parents, spouses and children of Soldiers who receive their citizenship posthumously. As of May 2008, 116 Servicemen had received posthumous citizenship.²¹

Within the government, the naturalization of military personnel enjoys favorable opinion, presidential and legislative support, and all implementing agencies have set their best foot forward to get the job done. Nonetheless, members of the Armed Forces still confront many challenges maneuvering through the unwieldy seas of the immigration bureaucracy. One of the contributing factors to the complexity and delays was triggered by a flood of applications filed with USCIS last summer in advance of the 66 percent fee increases that took effect on July 30, 2007.²²

In recent months, Judge Advocate General (JAG) attorneys have had to deal with increasingly complicated immigration legal questions and have sought help from attorneys and legal aid groups with more extensive experience on the subject. Some of these complicated issues deal with family members who are eligible under current law, but who may, for various reasons, have difficulties securing lawful permanent residence.²³ During congressional testimony on May 20, 2008, attorney and lieutenant colonel, Margaret Stock, spoke of some of those challenges. She spoke of active duty military personnel who are being placed into removal proceedings due to technical violations of immigration law. Case in point,

Navy sailor Karla Rivera [who] was recently placed into removal proceedings because she failed to file Form I-751 to lift the conditions of her permanent residence—despite the fact that she is eligible for a waiver of the timely filling of the form, and despite having a pending citizenship application...It is unlikely that the United States Government will ever deport Karla—or that there would be any rational reason to deport Karla—but this sailor has had to attend removal proceedings on the other side of the country at her own expense, despite having a pending citizenship application that will likely be approved.²⁴

Other family members lose eligibility because the military orders them to go overseas while their applications are still pending. Moving from place to place may translate into lost notices that cause the petition to be considered “abandoned” by USCIS. The ability of family members to obtain Employment Authorization Documents, Social Security numbers and driver’s licenses is adversely affected by slow processing, the complexity of the procedures and the very high processing fees. Some family members of military personnel are only granted “Temporary Protected Status” and cannot obtain permanent residence. In some instances family members are

²⁰Marc Defreyn & Darrell Baughn. “Immigration and naturalization issues in the deployed environment.” *Army Lawyer* 47(6) (October 2005).

²¹ USCIS personal communication Sarah T. Taylor. July 18, 2008

²² Fernanda Santos. “After the War, a New Battle to Become Citizens. *The New York Times* on line edition. 24 February 2008. http://nytimes.com/2008/02/24/us/24vets.html?_r=1&oref=slogin. (21 July 2008).

²³ Margaret Stock. *Immigration Needs of Fighting Men and Women*. Statement to the committee on House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law. 20 May 2008

²⁴ Margaret Stock

forced to return to their countries of origin while their applications are pending, this is inconsistent with professed family values and the recognition of the sacrifice that military families endure for America.²⁵

In the last six years, the process of filing for naturalization has been greatly facilitated for military personnel. Servicemen can now file for expedited processing, have all fees waived, use the fingerprints they submitted at the time of enlistment, have the residency requirements waived; and if deployed, process and receive their naturalization overseas. In spite of all these accommodations, the legitimization of immigrants is a complex process and the bureaucracy that surrounds naturalization can be daunting and difficult to maneuver.

In an informational paper written for JAGs, Defreyn and Baughn (2005) highlight the importance of military members understanding both the role of designated unit personnel services and the servicemen themselves, “[a]lthough each servicemen is ultimately responsible for ensuring that his naturalization application packet is complete and accurate, legal assistance personnel can play a vital role in verifying that application packets are complete and accurate upon first submission.”²⁶ The authors further point to the fact that when mistakes are made in the application, USCIS usually sends a letter of inquiry to the Soldier’s home address, which is usually located in the States. Failure to respond to the query often results in the abandonment of the application.²⁷

There is a symbiotic relationship that has emerged between immigrants and the Armed Services. Immigrants provide recruits²⁸ and the Military provides an avenue for legitimization in a society that doesn’t quite know what to do about its immigrant “problem.” As an institution, the U.S. military has broken diversity barriers before other sectors of U.S. society. On July 26, 2008, the United States Department of Defense celebrated the 60th anniversary of racial integration in the Army. The situation for Blacks in the Armed Forces was dramatically improved, and their service to the nation recognized, through President Truman’s executive order to integrate the military.²⁹ Pentagon officials highlight the fact that this order went into effect six years before *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided making the military the leader in institutional integration. According to Undersecretary of Defense, David Chu, “What Truman really did was use the Armed Forces to change American society...The Armed Forces pride themselves in being leaders in this.”³⁰ The current global war on terror has highlighted the need for deliberate diversity management that goes beyond race. In an article published on the Department of Defense’s website, Army Lt. General Michael D. Rochelle is quoted as stating, “In 2002, as the Army was preparing for the possibility of war in Iraq, the Army’s recruiting command was given the mission to recruit Arabic linguists that would be needed for troops on the ground to communicate with local citizens. But the service couldn’t recruit and train them

²⁵ Margaret Stock

²⁶ Marc Defreyn & Darrell Baughn. “Immigration and naturalization issues in the deployed environment.” *Army Lawyer* 47(6) (October 2005).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ According to Chen and Segupta(2001) and Wong (2007) immigrants are more likely to enlist than young people born in the United States and fill in a void left by citizen soldiers. Wong further states that immigrants “helped to furnish the nation with the luxury of forgoing a draft to meet its defense needs.” (p. 172)

²⁹ U.S. Department of Defense. *60 Years of Military Integration*. http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2008/0708_integration/ (29 July 2008).

³⁰ Donna Miles. *Integration Brought Strength, Credibility to Military*, *Official Says*, 22 July 2008, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=50563> (29 July 2008).

fast enough... We were somewhat ill-prepared to do that, and it took quite a long time to spin the system up to the point of where we are today.”³¹ The number of Arabic Linguists currently in the Army is about 1,000, but it took over five years to reach that quantity.³²

Historically spinning the system to create a military force that reflects the population of the United States and meets the requisite skill variety of the mission, the Armed Forces are considered a model for inclusion. But while the inclusion of U.S. born people of diverse backgrounds may be a value most can adhere to, the expansion of such inclusion to encompass foreign-born Soldiers becomes a bit more complicated. Foreign-born soldiers have been the subject of suspicion in time of war and in time of peace³³. Furthermore, a policy that facilitates the recruitment of non-citizens is met with distrust by liberal groups who see it as a form of exploiting immigrants’ desires of legitimization and belonging and with pragmatic resolve by those who see immigrants as an untapped pool for military recruitment. Thus expedited naturalization becomes a controversial policy that appears as a tribute to some and a bounty to others.

Tribute and Recognition

During these seven years of the War on Terror, senior officials of the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, the president and both presidential candidates have praised the contributions and sacrifices of foreign-born soldiers. The media has risen awareness of the sacrifices of immigrant soldiers like Marine Lance Cpl. José Gutierrez from Guatemala, Marine Lance Cpl. Jesús Suárez del Solar and Cpl. José Ángel Garibay from México, and Army Pfc. Diego Rincón from Colombia who were among the first casualties of the war in Iraq. It is not uncommon to hear commendations such as “Even before you took the oath, you put duty, honor and country ahead of yourselves. You put your lives on the line for Americans you haven’t even met. I thank you deeply for your service.”³⁴ All previously explored congressional steps toward a streamlined application process are framed in the paradigm that foreign-born soldiers deserve to be recognized by their adoptive country for their willingness to sacrifice, even the White House press release announcing the Executive Order was presented under the rubric: *Honoring Members of American’s Armed Forces*.³⁵ Foreign-born soldiers are deemed our soldiers and their place of birth becomes almost an accident of geography when compared with the sentiment of patriotic cohesion expressed in governmental communications. USCIS Director Emilio González during his testimony to Congress stated:

The common bond that unites every Soldier, sailor, airman, and Marine is a commitment to duty, honor, and country. Whether native born, naturalized, or not U.S. citizens at all, service members are unified not by a common heritage, race, religion or creed, but rather by this universal code that builds character, breeds

³¹ Fred W. Baker III. Army Personnel Official Calls Diversity a National Security Issue. (25 July 2008). <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=50604> (29 July 2008).

³² Fred W. Baker III.

³³ See Wong & Cho for a detailed overview of loyalty concerns about foreign-born soldiers throughout U.S. history.

³⁴ Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff during a naturalization ceremony at Walter Reed Medical Center on March 13, 2007. In Carmen L. Gleason (13 March 2008). Wounded Troops become citizens at Walter Reed ceremony. <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=3353> (16 September 2008).

³⁵ Fact Sheet: Honoring Members of American’s Armed Forces. 4 July 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/07/20020704.html>

conviction and encourages valor. The code has a way of superseding nationalities. The placement of foreign-born and native Soldiers together within a platoon, on a ship at sea, attached to an air squadron or a fire team, ensures that the only true measure of a fighting man or woman is their steadfast dedication to the mission and reverence for the chain of command. Under fire, all other considerations are irrelevant.³⁶

Hence service in the Armed Forces is deemed a way toward legitimization into society, a manner to prove one's worth to the nation and expedited citizenship is deemed a reward for the willingness to assume duties that generally would follow the acquisition of citizenship.

Bounty

While government agencies and military personnel exalt the service of foreign-born Soldiers and characterize the expedited naturalization as a win-win, others express mistrust for underlying motivations behind the loosening of restrictions and expedited processing of applications. One such expression of mistrust points to the Pentagon's support for the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act).³⁷ This bill includes the condition of college education or two years of military service as possible paths toward American citizenship for high school graduates who arrived in the U.S. before the age of 15, have lived in the U.S. for at least five years, are between the ages of 12 and 30 at the time of application and display good moral character.³⁸ In July 2007, Senator Durbin of Illinois took the floor and in part of his statement said:

...many in the Department of Defense believe, as I do, that the DREAM Act is an important part of making certain we have talented young men and women ready to serve in our military. I have spoken to people at the Department of Defense who support the idea of the DREAM Act. I think we ought to include it in the Defense authorization bill. I hope to have that opportunity.³⁹

The DREAM Act has been tossed around Capitol Hill since 2001 and continues to come short of the necessary votes for passage. The link to military service was created in 2003 as a way to entice Republican legislators. Nonetheless, it also received support from many pro-immigrant organizations such as the Council of La Raza, and educational organizations like the American Council for Education, SURGE (Students United to Reach Goals in Education), R.I.S.E (Rising Immigrant Scholars through Education) and IDEAS (Improving Dreams, Equality, Access & Success). Many experts estimate the number of potential DREAM Act beneficiaries at about 750,000 and growing by about 65,000 per year.⁴⁰ According to Stock, these "potential DREAM Act beneficiaries are also likely to be a military recruiter's dream

³⁶ Emilio T. González. Hearing on Contributions of Immigrants to the U.S. Military. A statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services. 10 July 2006. Retrieved from http://www.uscis.gov/files/testimony/mil_natz_060710.pdf (7 June 2008).

³⁷ The Dream Act was first proposed in 2001 and is currently awaiting a reintroduction which is estimated to take place in 2009.

³⁸ DREAM Act. S.2205

³⁹ Senator Dick Durbin. Floor Statement: Dream Act as an Amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill. 13 July 2007. <http://durbin.senate.gov/showRelease.cfm?releaseId=280889> (20 July 2008). This proposal on the part of Senator Durbin drew sharp criticism and as of now the DREAM act's future is uncertain.

⁴⁰ Justin Akers Chacón & Lee Sustar. Why was the DREAM Act Defeated? (2 November 2007). <http://socialistworker.org> (29 July 2008).

candidates for enlistment; they are not ‘bottom of the barrel’ recruits even if they have no legal status.”⁴¹ They have lived in the U.S. for at least five years, are most often bilingual with native-like fluency in English and their heritage language, as beneficiaries they will have had a complete criminal history check which will be facilitated by their not having spent any of their adult life on foreign countries. Furthermore, they will be holding a “conditional lawful residence” which is a status long accepted for military enlistment. These youth’s willingness to serve will also be impacted by their service being a path toward citizenship.⁴² It is this last item in the list of what makes possible DREAM Act beneficiaries perfect Army recruits that awakens the suspicions of people in many circles. Some legislators like James Inhofe (R- Oklahoma) have deemed it to be masked amnesty and an insult to those immigrants who came to the United States legally.⁴³ Immigrant supporters and anti-war individuals and groups caution that this type of enticement may adversely affect a societal group desperate to be legalized and who may join the armed forces driven by erroneous motivations.⁴⁴

Whereby the expedited path to citizenship through military service has enhanced the lives of lawful permanent residents who have immediate access to naturalization, the entanglement of military service into the immigration and naturalization discussion creates a conundrum for policy members on both sides of the issue. Are the policies of expedited naturalization of foreign-born Soldiers and the proposed military service requirements of the DREAM Act ways of recognizing the contributions of immigrants to our national interests? Are they masked forms of amnesty or military draft? The answer still eludes us and the discussion is likely to continue. On July 11, 2008, presidential candidate John McCain released an add highlighting the contributions of Hispanics to the war efforts⁴⁵ and in 2009 legislators plan to reintroduce the DREAM Act bill for senate consideration. So far, there is no talk of removing the military service provision from this bill.

⁴¹ Margaret Stock. The Dream Act: Tapping an Overlooked Pool of Homegrown Talent to Meet Military Enlistment Needs. 15 January 2006. http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PolicyWire/Legislation/Stock_DREAMAct.pdf (29 July 2008).

⁴² Margaret Stock

⁴³ Justin Akers Chacón & Lee Sustar. Why was the DREAM Act Defeated? (2 November 2007). <http://socialistworker.org> (29 July 2008).

⁴⁴ Justin Akers Chacón & Lee Sustar

⁴⁵ Michael Falcone. McCain Ad Reaches Out to Hispanics. 11 July 2008 <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/11/mccain-ad-reaches-out-to-hispanics/> (29 July 2008).

In its entirety the add states:

JOHN MCCAIN: My friends, I want you the next time you're down in Washington, D.C., to go to the Vietnam War Memorial and look at the names engraved in black granite. You'll find a whole lot of Hispanic names.

When you go to Iraq or Afghanistan today, you're going to see a whole lot of people who are of Hispanic background. You're even going to meet some of the few thousand that are still green card holders who are not even citizens of this country, who love this country so much that they're willing to risk their lives in its service in order to accelerate their path to citizenship and enjoy the bountiful, blessed nation.

So let's from time to time remember that these are God's children. They must come into country legally, but they have enriched our culture and our nation as every generation of immigrants before them.

Thank you.

JOHN MCCAIN: I'm John McCain and I approve this message.

The naturalization of servicemen and women is in the national interest because only U.S. citizens can receive certain degrees of security clearance which directly affect the readiness of the unit and because only in awarding citizenship to those immigrants who fight for this country is their sacrifice fully honored. Furthermore, international diversity within the military enriches its cultural knowledge base and enhances its understanding of various situations around the world.

As far as military leaders are concerned, the national background of men and women who have voluntarily join the United States Armed Forces does not have any negative effects on the morale or readiness nor does it compromise the loyalty of their unit. The U.S. military prides itself in being a diverse and inclusive institution. It also recognizes that its diversity must be managed to insure the skills requisite variety necessary to accomplish their mission.

As we continue to debate over immigration reform in the U.S., it may be helpful to look at how the military recognizes the contributions of foreign born soldiers and how it requires its U.S.-born members to learn about and integrate their immigrant peers. Time will tell if the recognition of immigrants' valor and sacrifice within the military will trickle into the larger society and influence the way in which we relate to them.

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