

“Affirming the American Dream”

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President, Indiana University

Naturalization Ceremony
Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site
1230 N. Delaware St., Indianapolis, IN
Tuesday, July 3, 2012
10:00 a.m.

Thank you, Judge Barker.

And to my fellow citizens of the United States, my warmest congratulations!

Less than 19 months ago, I was, as you are today, a newly-naturalized citizen.

On the Bloomington campus of Indiana University (on my 60th birthday, coincidentally), Judge Barker administered the oath of citizenship to my three Australian-born children and to me.

Watching you taking the oath a few moments ago was deeply inspiring, and, of course, it brought back memories of the day my children and I took the oath.

It was a day I will never forget, just as, I trust, this day will be an indelible memory for you.

As Judge Barker mentioned, I was born and raised in Australia.

What fewer people know is that my father was an immigrant to Australia from Scotland. My father did not finish high school, and I am a first-generation college graduate.

I made my first trip to the United States in 1985. A little more than a decade after that first trip, I found myself, like my father, an immigrant—though this time to America. I came to the United States—specifically, to Bloomington, Indiana—from Australia in 1997 to serve as Vice President for Information Technology at Indiana University.

I fell in love with the United States, the state of Indiana, and Indiana University. My children have been educated at American institutions, including IU. Over the last 15 years, my family and I have become Hoosiers, Indiana has become our home, and today I am very proud to be an American citizen.

In 2007, I was named president of Indiana University. I said at the time—and it is still true—that I could imagine no greater honor than being named president of IU. For me it was both the fulfillment of a personal dream and an affirmation of the American Dream.

There are few places where through hard work and modest success one can earn the privilege of leading one of the world's great research universities. The United States is such a place, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunities this nation has provided.

Today we are gathered at the home of President Benjamin Harrison, the 23rd President of the United States, who noted more than 120 years ago that America was uniquely situated as a land of opportunity. In his 1889 inaugural address, President Harrison said: “we have not attained an ideal condition. . . .but on the whole, the opportunities offered to the individual to secure the comforts of life are better than are found elsewhere and largely better than they were one hundred years ago.”¹

¹ Benjamin Harrison, Inaugural Address, delivered March 4, 1889, as reprinted in John Vance Cheney (ed.), *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States*, Volume 2, (Donnelley & Sons, 1905), 64.

Though the phrase had not yet been coined at the time of his inauguration, the sort of opportunity of which President Harrison spoke was—and is—a key element of the American Dream. As you became citizens today, each of you affirmed the idea that America is a place where our natural abilities, applied with resolve and industry—can “secure the comforts of life” and can lead to success.

Of course, this idea is as old as our nation. Thomas Jefferson wrote of a “natural aristocracy... the grounds of (which) are virtue and talents.”²

At Indiana University, we believe that one’s natural abilities are greatly enhanced by a quality education.

Education and democracy share a fundamental set of values. Both are based firmly on the idea that together we can create a brighter future. Both are expressions of optimism that require a belief in possibility. Both encourage and enable us to make a difference for generations we may never know.

I hope you will look back on this day as not just the day you became citizens, but as the day you became active and engaged citizens: fully vested participants in democracy who vote at every opportunity, volunteer in your communities, and who, perhaps, one day will run for elected office.

President Harrison said in 1889 that we had not yet attained an ideal state in America.

Perhaps that is still true today.

² Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813, as reprinted Lester Jesse Cappon (ed.) *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: the Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 388.

But as active and engaged citizens of the United States, you have the power to help create a brighter future, to help “form a more perfect Union,” and to make a difference for generations of future citizens.

Congratulations and best wishes to each of you.