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Local



NEW U.S. CITIZENS FINALLY FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG

CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARADVERTISER.COM

As part of Independence Day celebrations nationwide, 98 people from 27 countries became U.S. citizens on Wednesday in a naturalization ceremony aboard the USS Missouri battleship at Pearl Harbor. The diverse group included several active U.S. service members and people who have lived in Hawaii nearly all their lives. Above, Imelda Mendoza was the first to receive her naturalization certificate. Below, from left, sat Matthew Ross, Giancarlo LeGrand Rios, Brian Pham, Roger Liu, Joy Ancheta and Katherine Casuga.

Nearly 100 people take part in a naturalization ceremony aboard the USS Missouri

By Amy Busek
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EARTHA Hoyos' grin said it all. Unlike the mostly stoic participants seated around her Wednesday, the Colombian native revealed the joy she felt at the end of her two-year journey toward U.S. citizenship.

"I don't feel like a guest anymore," Hoyos said.

Ninety-eight applicants from 27 countries participated in a naturalization ceremony aboard the USS Missouri battleship at Pearl Harbor.

The event was part of an Independence Day celebration through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is holding 51 naturalization ceremonies across the country between July 1 and 5.

U.S. SEN. Mazie Hirono spoke at Wednesday's event, drawing on her own experience emigrating from Japan as a child. The other speakers at the ceremony were U.S. District Judge Susan Old Mollway, chief judge of federal court for Hawaii, and Rear Adm. Bret Mullenburg, Pacific Fleet civil engineer and commander of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Pacific.

"We are a nation of immigrants and there's no better example than here in Hawaii," Hirono said. "I am proof of what this country has to offer."

Of the nearly 100 people who became citizens, six are active members in the



"I don't feel like a guest anymore."

Eartha Hoyos
Colombian native, above, pledging allegiance

armed forces.

The oldest applicant was a 74-year-old man from the Philippines; the youngest was an 18-year-old man from Hong Kong. Some of the countries represented were Ecuador, Laos, India, Belarus and Egypt. The largest ethnic group was from the Philippines.

To become a citizen as an adult, a person must pass a naturalization exam that tests one's ability to speak, write and read English as well as knowledge of major events in American history.



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Hirono talked about the immigration reform bill passed by the Senate last month — a measure that aims to loosen restrictions on obtaining green cards for residence in the country.

"Upon its passage, millions of undocumented people in our country will have that opportunity to be on the path that you took to become United States citizens," Hirono said.

Tony Faasalafalealofa Toelupe Peau Ulma of Waipahu was born in American Samoa, but has lived in Hawaii since he was 6 months old. As a husband and father to three children, the 37-year-old underwent naturalization so he could be a voter.

"Now I want to vote," Ulma said. "I never thought I was going to need (citizenship) but now I'm married and my wife is from Samoa,

too. (I want to help her) get what she needs for American citizenship."

Eizabeta Kiseleva, formerly a Russian citizen, moved to America for love. Her husband is in the U.S. Air Force.

"I met my husband and we got married," Kiseleva said. "I moved here three years ago (and) the whole process since I applied (took)

three months."

Like Ulma, some permanent residents already feel like Hawaii is home — they just need citizenship as a final step toward more open doors.

South Korean-born Tae Eun Kim is married to a resident and has lived in Honolulu for 10 years, but she's finally getting her citizenship now, at age 31.

"If I can (get naturalized), anything can happen for me in America," Kim said.

