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Consortium Founder Tells Newest U.S. Citizens Status is Not Enough, Hard Work Needed to Achieve American Dream

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From left to right, Menissa Joseph and Anastacia Nicholson joined 25 other individuals in becoming U.S. citizens on Wed. July 13, 2022 during a ceremony at the V.I. District Court on St. Croix presided over by Judge Wilma A. Lewis. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The latest naturalization ceremony in the USVI to welcome new citizens of the United States took place in the VI District Court today Wednesday.

27 of the 40 total people eligible attended the ceremony presided over by Judge Wilma A. Lewis, during which they recited the Oath of Allegiance officially for the first time before they were

confirmed as citizens of the United States of America.

Judge Lewis spoke, not only of the benefits of becoming a US citizen such as the right to vote, but the duties associated with citizenship as well, such as serving on a jury.

Today's ceremony, the first post-pandemic ceremony where candidates and officials gathered face to face in the same room, featured our very own Ernice Gilbert as keynote speaker. Gilbert, founder and publisher of the Virgin Islands Consortium, recounted his own citizenship journey which began over two decades ago. Born on the island of Dominica, Gilbert left his home country in the early 2000's for the opportunities he says he knew the United States of America afforded.

In his remarks to the newly naturalized American citizens, Gilbert said that other immigrants who achieved monumental success served as his inspiration - Google co-founder Sergey Brin, who was born in the former USSR, and Elon Musk, the man who co-founded PayPal before moving on to helm Tesla and SpaceX, along the way becoming the richest man in the world. Musk was born and raised in South Africa before he immigrated to the United States.

Gilbert also highlighted the success story of music, fashion and beauty mega mogul Rihanna, his CARICOM neighbour from the island of Barbados. Just last week, the woman some in her home country may better know as Robyn Fenty became the youngest female self-made billionaire in the United States, where she relocated in her quest to become a star.

The Consortium founder spoke with pride about the publication that now serves news to tens of thousands of Virgin Islanders at home and abroad, along with additional thousands of other Caribbean, American, and European nationals. Gilbert expressed gratitude towards the decision of the founding fathers to enshrine the press, or the Fourth Estate, as a bedrock of American democracy. He described the publication's dogged pursuit of accountability and dissemination of information in the public interest as twinned with the great American ideals of freedom and justice.

Gilbert and Judge Lewis both admonished his fellow citizens that their new status did not automatically confer success, and reminded them that hard work was integral to the achievement of their American dream. The Consortium publisher warned that the dream could not be sustained through mere selfish pursuit of financial goals, but that it required all citizens - through birth or via immigration - to fight for freedom, to stand for truth, to challenge their elected officials, and to get involved in their community in a way that goes beyond just fulfilling the obligation of taxes.

The people who became America's newest citizens today, Gilbert hoped, would add strength to the diversity of the United States of America, contribute their wisdom to the country's leadership, and shore up the power of the people of the United States.