



**Ranking Member Peter Welch
Opening Remarks as Delivered**

**Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution Hearing:
*Protecting American Citizenship III: Denaturalization and its Constitutional Limits***

June 3, 2026

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank our witnesses for being here. Today is our third hearing this Congress in this Subcommittee on ‘protecting American citizenship.’ All of them have focused on the topic of immigration and today’s topic is on denaturalization of non-native born citizens—and I will get to that in a moment.

But first, I want to make a point at what we’ve not looked at. The administration has—it is absolutely clear—a very radical goal, and that is mass deportation of immigrants from our country. This includes Dreamers, DACA recipients, folks here legally. And I oppose that. It’s doing real damage to our country.

And as part of that effort, we’ve seen the abusive lengths that this administration is willing to go: the violence in Minnesota—that’s receded. But the cruelty of these policies to create fear and anxiety include targeting of legal immigrants.

The Trump Administration has violently clamped down on Americans exercising their constitutional rights. In Minnesota, of course, we saw the killing of two people: a 37-year-old nurse; 37-year-old mother. Immigration agents have detained U.S. citizens, including a Vermonter—a respected principal, Wilmer Chavarria—a school superintendent who was pulled out of a Houston airport and told: ‘You have no rights here.’

The Department of Homeland Security has authorized immigration agents to enter the homes of Americans without a judicial warrant. Immigrants have been deported without due process, sometimes in defiance of federal court orders prohibiting their deportation.

The White House has turned to pulling every bureaucratic lever that the White House has, within its considerable power—cutting off immigrants from jobs, financial services, medical care, tax credits and daycare. There was an woman, an immigrant from El Salvador, legally in this country, providing janitorial services at the Boston airport—a job she revered. It gave her life dignity and she did it well. Last year the administration had her fired, declaring that because of her legal immigration status, she could not carry out the work she had done for almost three decades.

This is all part of a radical crusade against immigration. It's not about securing the border—we're for that. It's not about deporting criminals—we're for that. It's about going after people, including folks here legally, and I absolutely oppose that.

Mr. Chairman, yesterday my granddaughter graduated from Montgomery Blair High School, and I attended. There were 2,000 kids in her class. Many of the speakers were first-generation graduates of high school. The pride of the parents, seeing their kids graduate, and the words of these kids where they spoke about values; they spoke about a life of purpose; they spoke about commitment to community; they spoke about friendship.

We should be honoring and protecting those kids who are our future and putting our energies into protecting them, and not just focusing on these other issues that are about implementation of this mass deportation policy. This is too important for the future of our country and it's very important to the present of our country that we treat legally entitled people with real dignity.

Turning to the topic of today's hearing, denaturalization, I want to be clear. I agree, I agree with [Senator Schmitt], that we should not allow people to abuse our immigration system. People should not be able to deceive the government and acquire citizenship by lying. We should be tough on fraud.

But expanding denaturalization is not in furtherance of that goal in this administration. It's intended to create fear in our communities, to prevent people who are legally here from showing up to school, working, or seeing doctors. And by the way, some of those kids had family members—I'm taking at Montgomery Blair—who were picked up, even though they were here legally.

Under current law, naturalized citizenship can be revoked if it was procured illegally or by concealment of material fact or willful misrepresentation. So, again, I want to be clear: I support that. But I don't agree that naturalized citizens should be punished for something that happens after they become a citizen.

And that is not just my view—it's the view of the Supreme Court. So, we do not have to reach too far back in our nation's history to see that a familiar cycle is unfolding. Denaturalization efforts have been clustered around both World Wars and the Red Scare. And under the guise of national security, has been abused—as some folks abuse the immigration system—and targeting people, including immigrants, for their associations; for their speech; and political beliefs.

It's been abused in our history time and again. And yes, American citizenship, Mr. Chairman, is precious. It is precious. Those kids that I saw at high school—they believe that. They are committed to making this a better country, to making ours a better community. But broadening the administration's authority to strip citizenship would put 24.5 million naturalized Americans at risk.

In April, I attended a naturalization ceremony back in Vermont, and I think a lot of my colleagues have done that in their states. It's one of the most ennobling and

inspiring experiences that we can have: to see a person who, by choice, has undertaken the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. They see it as a responsibility, and they put in years of hard work in order to achieve that status.

So yes, where there's fraud, where there's lying, and that is the basis upon which a person received a citizenship certificate, take it away. But not use this process to add to the attack on people, so many of whom are here legally and who have the aspirations of those young kids, graduates of high school that I met yesterday. I yield back.

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