

WHAT DOES CITIZENSHIP MEAN?

For starters, it means *Allegiance* ...

by Vic Berecz

I hate to start a discussion with a definition, but here goes. **Allegiance: the obligation of loyalty of a citizen to their government.** Yes, citizenship has obligations and we American citizens get a whole bunch of benefits for maintaining that loyalty ... starting with life in the greatest country on earth. Yet common sense says that you can't be absolutely loyal to two nations which now are, or in the future may be, at odds with each other on lots of issues.

That's why people, when they become US naturalized citizens, proclaim their allegiance publicly after learning our language and learning more about our history and government than is known to all too many of us native-born citizens. While naturalized citizens "absolutely" renounce "all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty" to which they were previously subject, our U.S. State Department website notes that:

The U.S. Government recognizes that dual nationality exists but does not encourage it as a matter of policy because of the problems it may cause. Claims of other countries on dual national U.S. citizens may conflict with U.S. law, and dual nationality may limit U.S. Government efforts to assist citizens abroad. The country where a dual national is located generally has a stronger claim to that person's allegiance.

So *dual citizenship* does exist ... but, I believe, dual allegiance cannot. Our government can do nothing about foreign laws that view naturalized (and even native-born) Americans as a citizens of their country. But, we do control our laws, and we can and should take stronger measures to limit dual nationality and exert that "stronger claim" on American citizens' loyalty. Today this ought to include sanctions on American citizens actively applying for foreign citizenship, without the intent of giving up their U.S. citizenship.

Another useful way to reduce the number of *dual nationals* is to keep children born in the U.S. to *tourists* and *undocumented aliens* from automatically gaining American citizenship. These babies are born here due in part to the ease of modern travel, and are immediately Americans by virtue of the Civil-War-era 14th Amendment which was intended to make the freed slaves citizens. It's a problem of applying old rules to new situations. Resolving this issue would also mitigate the problems many of us have with *separating families* of *undocumented immigrants*. I think we need something like the recent *Senate Joint Resolution 6*, introduced by Sen. David Vitter (R-LA), which proposes a Constitutional Amendment that says a person born in the U.S. is *NOT* a citizen unless at least one parent is: a citizen, an alien legal permanent resident, or an alien active duty armed services member; or is naturalized.

In this posting I've used the term *native-born* American ... something which has never been adequately defined by law. Yet the term causes considerable difficulty both in the context of dual citizenship and in the constitutional qualifications for our President. Perhaps we also need something like the 2003 constitutional amendment proposed by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) which would allow foreign-born persons who have been naturalized citizens for two decades to become President. That would (with the Vitter amendment) reduce the rationale for illegal immigration while giving recognition to the value of immigration. But, let's always remember, all citizens have an obligation of allegiance

... and dual allegiance doesn't make sense.