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Immigration is American

Contrary to what Kasey Knowles and others think, there is nothing “un-American” about people singing about our country’s beauty in languages other than English.

In fact, as seen at Monday’s naturalization ceremony at Intrust Bank Arena, there’s not much that is more American than immigrants coming to this country to share in its promises and freedoms.

Knowles, who in November was crowned National American Miss Kansas 2013, gained unwanted

notoriety this week for tweeting about a Coca-Cola advertisement aired during the Super Bowl. The ad featured “America the Beautiful” sung in multiple languages alongside images of America’s landscape and people.

“Nothing about that #CocaCola commercial was American,” Knowles tweeted.

After she started getting criticism for her comments, Knowles tried the old passive apology: “I’m sorry if you were offended.” But showing that she wasn’t really sorry, she added: “I truly feel that ‘America the Beautiful’ should not be sung in any other language.”

Later, she deleted the tweets and said in a Facebook statement that the posts were a “mistake.”

Some conservative talk-show hosts, including Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, also blasted the ad Monday, calling it divisive and speculating that it was part of a political campaign to promote federal immigration reform.

Meanwhile, 88 men and women from 36 countries gathered Monday

night at the arena in downtown Wichita to be sworn in as naturalized citizens. They raised their right hands and repeated the U.S. Oath of Allegiance. They swore, some in broken English, to “support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America.”



Nearly 90 people became naturalized U.S. citizens Monday night in Wichita.

The featured speaker at the ceremony was Neeli Bendapudi, dean of the University of Kansas School of Business. Bendapudi, a recently naturalized citizen from India, took joy in greeting the group as “my fellow Americans.” She

noted how the new citizens wear different styles of clothes, eat different foods and practice different religions, but that they all believe in the American dream of opportunity.

She told them to “be very proud Kansans” but also to be proud of immigrants. She pointed out how a large percentage of America’s Fortune 500 companies were founded by first-generation immigrants or their children. Immigrants also provide labor that helps build America.

“Immigrants bring a great deal to this country,” she said.

Bendapudi also noted how immigrants make a deliberate choice, often at great personal sacrifice, to come to America and become citizens. And she expressed the hope that U.S.-born citizens appreciate how fortunate they are to be Americans.

If asked, not all of the new citizens would have been able to sing “America the Beautiful” in English. But they sure felt that pride in their hearts.

— For the editorial board, Phillip Brownlee