

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Cinco de Mayo Celebration

May 5, 2010

The President. Hello, everybody.

Audience member. Viva Obama!

The President. Viva! [Laughter] Good evening, everyone. *Buenas noches.* Michelle and I are so honored to welcome you to the White House. And you all brought outstanding weather, so we thank you for that. [Laughter] Thank you. I know that a lot of you would rather be watching tonight's game, the Spurs against *los* Suns from Phoenix.

Tonight's another one of our great events here at the White House celebrating Latino culture in America, including our concert some of you might have attended that we had during Hispanic Heritage Month on the South Lawn, *Fiesta Latina.* And Malia and Sasha will probably never forget playing drums with Sheila E. [Laughter] Michelle, on the other hand, would prefer to forget the sight of me trying to dance with Thalia. [Laughter] I didn't think I was that bad. [Laughter]

The First Lady. You were okay. [Laughter]

The President. But there will be no—[laughter]—there will be no repeat performances tonight.

Audience members. Aww. [Laughter]

The President. We gather to mark a day that's become as celebrated here in the United States as it is in Mexico. And we're honored to be joined by Mexico's Interior Secretary, Fernando Gomez Mont, and his lovely wife Gloria. Please give them a big round of applause. It's good to see you again. And a great friend to me and the United States, Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan and his wonderful wife Veronica, who are also here; it's good to see you again.

Now, the events of this date in history are well-known, how nearly 150 years ago, at the Battle of Puebla, a band of Mexican patriots faced off against a massive European army and won a victory that inspires the world to this day. Less well-known is that General Zaragoza, who led those patriots, was born in what is now the town of Goliad in Texas. In fact, you can go there today.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Are you from there?

Audience member. Yes.

The President. You can visit his birthplace. It's a historic landmark, includes a 10-foot tall statue of the general, presented by the people of Mexico and preserved by the people of the United States.

So the glory of this day is shared by both of our countries. And so is the pride in the lasting contributions that Hispanics have made to America throughout our history, including the men and women who join us here tonight.

We're joined by dedicated Members of Congress and members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, as well as some of their staffs. This includes Senator Bob Menendez; hey, Bob. Representative Xavier Becerra—where's Xavier? There he is, back there. Chairwoman Nydia Velazquez—where's Nydia?

We're joined by outstanding members of my Cabinet, including Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. Hilda! As well as Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano is here. And although she's down—although he's down on the Gulf helping to lead our response to the oil spill, I want to acknowledge my outstanding Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar.

We're joined by Hispanic Americans serving at every level of my Government. And I'm proud that we've nominated more Latinos to senior positions than any administration in history, not just because they're Latino, but because they're the best people for the job. And I should note that many of those appointments are Latinas, wise Latinas, undoubtedly. And although she's not here tonight, I think we should give a little round of applause to our first Latina on the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor.

We're also joined by leaders from every segment of American society. And I especially want to welcome those of you serving on the commission to explore the creation of a new museum in Washington to celebrate the history of Latinos in America. And I look forward to seeing the results of the commission's hard work and to the day when we open the doors on a new National Museum of the American Latino.

Tonight's performers are a wonderful example of how Latin culture's shaped and strengthened the fabric of America. So I want to say thank you to Maru and the Montero Dance Company, along with Javier Cortes. Thank you very much. Before I came out, I was listening to you guys inside. [*Laughter*] You sounded really good.

Now, by celebrating the story of Hispanics in America, we're really celebrating the larger story of America. After all, the dreams of Mexican Americans and all Latinos are the same dreams as any other American. It's why, in the face of unprecedented economic crises, we took bold action to get our economy growing again, creating jobs again, and laying the foundation for lasting prosperity. That's good for all Americans, including Hispanics, among whom the unemployment rate remains unacceptably high and who are ready to go back to work.

It's why, after nearly a century, we passed historic health care reform, with the help of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. And we're grateful to them. That's good for all Americans. It's good for all Americans, including the millions of Latinos who will finally get the coverage they lack today, as well as the Latino small-business owners who will finally be able to provide coverage for their employees. And that allows them to join the children of legal immigrants, who are finally able to get health care through the SCHIP program, something that we did very early on in my administration.

It's why we've made college more affordable, why we're reforming education. And that's good for all children, including Latinos, who, instead of having the highest dropout rate, deserve every chance to achieve their God-given potential.

So today reminds us that America's diversity is America's strength. That's why I spoke out against the recently passed law in Arizona. Make no mistake: Our immigration system is broken. And after so many years in which Washington has failed to meet its responsibilities, Americans are right to be frustrated, including folks along border States. But the answer isn't to undermine fundamental principles that define us as a nation. We can't start singling out people because of who they look like or how they talk or how they dress. We can't turn law-abiding

American citizens and law-abiding immigrants into subjects of suspicion and abuse. We can't divide the American people that way. That's not the answer. That's not who we are as the United States of America.

And that's why I've instructed my administration to closely monitor the new law in Arizona, to examine the civil rights and other implications that it may have. That's why we have to close the door on this kind of misconceived action by meeting our obligations here in Washington.

So I want to say it again, just in case anybody's confused: The way to fix our broken immigration system is through commonsense, comprehensive immigration reform. And that means responsibility from our Government to secure our borders, something we have done and will continue to do. It means responsibility from businesses that break the law by undermining American workers and exploiting undocumented workers. They've got to be held accountable. It means responsibility from people who are living here illegally. They've got to admit that they broke the law and pay taxes and pay a penalty and learn English and get right before the law and then get in line and earn their citizenship.

Comprehensive reform, that's how we're going to solve this problem. And I know there's been some commentary over the last week since I talked about this difficult issue. Well, is this politically smart to do? Can you get Republican votes? Look, of course, it's going to be tough; that's the truth. Anybody who tells you it's going to be easy or that I can wave a magic wand and make it happen hasn't been paying attention to how this town works. *[Laughter]*

We need bipartisan support. But it can be done, and it needs to be done. So I was pleased to see a strong proposal for comprehensive reform presented in the Senate last week, and I was pleased that it was based on a bipartisan framework. I want to begin work this year, and I want Democrats and Republicans to work with me, because we've got to stay true to who we are, a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

That's the spirit that I saw in some remarkable men and women that I recently hosted right here in the Rose Garden. They came from more than a dozen countries. And even though they weren't yet citizens, they had enlisted in the United States military. And one woman was named Perla Ramos, and she was born and raised in Mexico. She came to the United States shortly after 9/11. Her husband was a U.S. marine, and she said, "A passion for the military grew inside me."

In time, she joined herself, enlisting in the Navy. And she said, "I take pride in our flag and the history that forged this great Nation and the history we write day by day." And as Perla's Commander in Chief, I took great pride in helping to swear her in, a daughter of Mexico and one of our newest American citizens. So she continues a great tradition of Mexican Americans serving in our military, someone in whom both our nations can take great pride.

So today I want us to remember the United States and Mexico are not simply neighbors bound by geography and history; we're two societies that are woven together by millions of family and friends, by common interests and a shared future. Those are bonds that are unbreakable. They're bonds of an aspirational community: you and your mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters who struggled and sacrificed to realize the American Dream. They're also bonds of commerce and trade that sustain millions of jobs, both in Mexico and in the United States.

They're bonds that are represented in the trust and respect that I have for President Calderon, as we work together to create opportunity and prosperity for our peoples and

confront the drug cartels and violence that threaten both our countries. It's the warmth that Michelle felt on her recent trip to Mexico, her first solo trip as First Lady. And it's the friendship and cooperation that we'll deepen when we host President Calderon and First Lady Margarita Zavala for their state visit and dinner in a couple of weeks.

That's the spirit that all of you are putting on display today. So thank you for living it in your own lives. Thank you for sharing it with us tonight.

Have a wonderful party. You can be as noisy as you want. [*Laughter*]

The First Lady. We can hear you.

The President. We can hear you, though. [*Laughter*] If it goes past a certain hour, we'll kick you out. [*Laughter*] All right?

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:58 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Sheila Escovedo, Ariadna Thalia Sodi Miranda, Maru Montero, and Javier Cortes; and Mexico's Ambassador to the U.S. Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Becerra, Xavier; Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Cortes, Javier; Escovedo, Sheila; Gomez Mont Urueta, Fernando Francisco; Menendez, Robert; Montero, Maru; Napolitano, Janet A.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Ramos de Chavira, Perla Concepcion; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Sarukhan Casamitjana, Arturo; Sodi Miranda, Ariadna Thalia; Solis, Hilda L.; Sotomayor, Sonia; Valencia Fedora, Pilar Veronica; Velazquez, Nydia M.; Zavala Gomez del Campo, Margarita Esther.

Subjects: American Latino, Commission To Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the; Arizona : Illegal immigration enforcement legislation; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Hispanic and Mexican American service members; Business and industry : Illegal immigrant labor, reduction efforts; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Cinco de Mayo; Civil rights : Minorities :: Racial profiling; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Defense and national security : Border security; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : High school dropout rate; Education : Minority students; Education : Reform legislation, proposed; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Mexico : Ambassador to U.S.; Mexico : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Crime and narco trafficking; Mexico : President; Mexico : Relations with U.S.; Mexico : Secretary of Government; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; Sports : Basketball.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000345.