

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order Renewing the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics

October 19, 2010

Excellent. Everybody, please be seated. Welcome to the White House, everybody. Thank you, Javier, for that outstanding introduction. I will not play you chess. [*Laughter*] You may not have won at the nationals, but you'd beat me. [*Laughter*] And then Malia and Sasha would laugh about it. [*Laughter*] We are very proud of you, and we're glad you are here.

Thank you also to the University of Texas-Pan American Mariachis that performed for us. And hello to everybody across the country participating in watch parties and in education reform efforts in your own communities. It's precisely that kind of participation—engaging the American people, giving all of you more say in the policies that affect your lives, and holding ourselves accountable to deliver real results in return—that is at the heart of a new Executive order I'm about to sign to strengthen the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

Now, before I sign this document, I'd like to acknowledge a few people who have been and will continue to be instrumental to our success: our Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana; our Assistant Secretary for Post-Secondary Education, Eduardo Ochoa; and our Assistant Deputy Secretary, Rosalinda Barrera.

I also want to thank Eduardo Padron, the president of Miami Dade Community College, who has been a leader in my administration's efforts to strengthen America's community colleges. And because that's not enough, in addition to running a community college, he's also agreed to serve as the Chair of this initiative's Presidential advisory commission. So we are grateful to you. This will be a group of 30 Latino leaders who are going to make sure that, when it comes to our children's education, my administration hears the voices of the Latino community loud and clear.

And I also want to give a special recognition to our recently confirmed Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Raul Yzaguirre. It was Raul's vision and tenacious commitment to equal education for all our people that helped this initiative become a reality back in 1990 under George H.W. Bush. And so we are very proud that he is here today to see that his work continues.

The question then back in 1990 is the same question we face now: How do we best improve educational opportunities and outcomes for our Hispanic students? Over the past year and a half, under Juan Sepulveda's leadership—and Juan, thank you for your outstanding work—[*applause*]—over the last year and a half, this initiative has worked to gather the answers from those who know best, people in communities across this country. Juan hosted more than a hundred conversations. He's taken comments from more than 10,000 Americans. And he's worked with leaders from more than 30 States, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, to come up with real solutions that work best for our kids.

We know why this is so important. Today, Latinos make up the largest minority group in America's schools—more than one in five students overall—and they face challenges of monumental proportions. Latino students are more likely to attend our lowest performing schools, more likely to learn in larger class sizes, more likely to drop out at higher rates. Fewer

than half take part in early childhood education. Only about half graduate on time from high school. And those who do make it to college often find themselves underprepared for its rigors. In just a single generation, America has fallen from first to ninth in college completion rates for all our students.

Now, this is not just a Latino problem; this is an American problem. We've got to solve it because if we allow these trends to continue, it won't just be one community that falls behind; we will all fall behind together. At a time when the unemployment rate for Americans who've never gone to college is almost double what it is for those who have gone to college; when most of the new jobs that are being created require some higher education; when other countries are out-educating us today to out-compete us tomorrow, making sure that we offer all our kids, regardless of race, a world-class education is more than a moral obligation. It is an economic imperative if we want to succeed in the 21st century.

And that's why, when I took office, I set two big goals for American education. One was to make sure all our students, like the ones who are here with us today, receive a complete and competitive education from cradle to career. And number two, by the year 2020—the year Javier will graduate from college—America will once again have a higher share of college graduates than any other nation on Earth. That is our goal.

Now, improving educational outcomes for the Hispanic community is critical to reaching these overall goals. And reaching these goals is behind every battle that we've waged on behalf of our children's education since I took office.

We are expanding and reforming early childhood education so that our children aren't behind by the time they reach the schoolhouse door. We're challenging programs that don't measure up to compete for their funding, because if you're receiving tax dollars, you'd better be able to deliver results for our children.

We've launched a Race to the Top encouraging States to change their schools from the bottom up for all our children—Black, White, and Latino alike. Already, 48 States and DC have competed to raise standards, improve curricula, and turn around struggling schools. And we'll take steps to recruit and train more good teachers, including bilingual teachers.

We're tackling the dropout crisis that affects the Hispanic community more than any other community. And we're challenging States and communities to turn around our 5,000 worst schools, including many of the ones that produce the most Latino and African American dropouts.

To reach the second goal that I've set, leading the world in the proportion of college graduates, we're offering middle class families the American opportunity tax credit, which is a tax credit worth up to \$2,500 a year that's already helped put the dream of a college degree within the reach of more than 12 million students from working families.

We're upgrading our community colleges so that we can link students looking for work with businesses looking to hire. We're funding and implementing the post-9/11 GI bill so our veterans, including our outstanding Latino veterans, can come home to the same chance to earn a college education as my grandfather had when he came back from World War II.

We're eliminating \$60 billion over the next decade in wasteful giveaways to banks that profited from a broken student loan system, and we're using that money to make college more affordable for millions of students. In fact, we estimate that these steps will make college more affordable for more than 150,000 additional Latino students.

And as I've said before, Congress should finally pass the "DREAM Act." I've supported this bill—[*applause*]*—*I have supported this bill for years, and I'll do everything it takes to sign it into law on behalf of students seeking a college education and those who wish to serve in our country's uniform.

Turning around our troubled schools, putting the dream of a college education within the reach of working families, educating our kids—all of them—to graduate ready for college, ready for a career, ready to make the most of their lives, that's what we're doing. That is why we're here.

But while strengthening Hispanic education in America is the purpose of this initiative, it's not something that can fall on the Department of Education alone. I expect agencies across the Federal Government to take this initiative seriously and support its mission. And it's also not something the government can do by itself. It's going to take all of us—public and private sectors, teachers and principals, all of you at home at those watch parties, parents getting involved in their kids' education and students giving their best—because the farther they go in school, the farther they will go in life, and that means the farther we'll go as a country.

Now I know there will be cynics out there who say that this improvement that we're seeking is not possible; that the reforms won't work; the problems in our education system are too entrenched. It's easy to think that way. This initiative, for example, has been around for 20 years, and we still face many of the same challenges. And it's true, as I've said ever since I ran for this office—and as everyone here knows firsthand—that change is hard. Change takes time. Fixing what is broken in our education system will not be easy. We won't see results overnight. It may take years, even decades, for all these changes to pay off.

But that's no reason not to get started. That's no reason not to strive for these changes. That's a reason for us, in fact, to start making them right now. It's a reason for us to follow through. And as long as I'm President, I will not give in to calls to shortchange any of our students.

So in the end, this is about building a brighter future where every child in this country—Black, White, Latino, Asian, or Native American; regardless of color, class, creed—has a chance to rise above any barrier to fulfill their God-given potential. It's about keeping the promise at the heart of this country that we love. The promise of a better life, the promise that our children will dream bigger, hope deeper, climb higher than we could ever imagine, that's the promise that so many of you work to advance each and every day in your own respective fields. And as long as I have the privilege of being your President, that's a promise that I intend to work to keep.

Thank you very much, everybody. Now I'm going to sign this initiative. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:11 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Javier Garcia, a student at Stell Middle School, Brownsville, TX, who introduced the President; and Juan Sepulveda, director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, signing Executive order renewing.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Barrera, Rosalinda B.; Bush, George, H.W.; Garcia, Javier; Melendez de Santa Ana, Thelma; Obama, Malia; Obama, Sasha; Ochoa, Eduardo M.; Padron, Eduardo J.; Sepulveda, Juan; Yzaguirre, Raul H.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : GI bill legislation; Dominican Republic : U.S. Ambassador; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : High school dropout rate; Education : Hispanic students :: Dropout and completion rates; Education : Hispanic students :: Performance and completion improvement efforts; Education : Minority students; Education : Parental involvement; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Postsecondary education :: Tax credits, expansion; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Public-private cooperation; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education : Teachers; Education, Department of : Assistant Deputy Secretary; Education, Department of : Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education ; Education, Department of : Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education; Education, Department of : Educational Excellence for Hispanics, White House Initiative on; Education, Department of : Race to the Top Fund; Employment and unemployment : College graduates, employment outlook; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Legislation, proposed : "Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2009".

DCPD Number: DCPD201000890.