

## Remarks to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute September 27, 1995

Thank you all. Please be seated. It is wonderful to be here, wonderful to be back. I thank Congressman and Mrs. Pastor for coming out here with me, and I thank Ed for that fine introduction. To your mistress of ceremonies, Giselle Fernandez; members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus; the Institute Board; your executive director, Rita Elizondo; and Secretary Cisneros and Mary Alice; Secretary Pena and Ellen; Secretary Riley and Tunky; Attorney General Reno; and all your honored guests: I thank you for inviting me to come again this year.

For 18 years you have held this event, and it's become a part of our Nation's important Hispanic Heritage Month. I have been here for 3 years running, and during these 3 years my daughter has been studying Spanish. So I hope you'll keep inviting me back; it's getting a little better each year. How's this? *Y me gusta hablar Espanol*. Is that okay? [Applause]

I was thinking tonight coming over here—it's not in my prepared remarks, but I was thinking of two connected events that shape what I wish to say to you tonight. The first was the honor I had to be a part of the premiere here a few months ago of that wonderful movie "Mi Familia." And the second was the experience I had just today to be with the Governor of the State of Oklahoma and Mrs. Keating, and the Mayor of Oklahoma City and Mrs. Norick, and a group from Oklahoma as they came here on their national tour, thanking all the volunteer workers who went to Oklahoma City in the aftermath of the horrible bombing of the Federal building. And what I thought and said there was that in that moment we all became a family, the whole country.

In Florida last week, Governor Lawton Chiles said that the central question of our time was whether we were going to be a community or a crowd. The Hispanic community in America has always been a community, always tried to live by family values, not just talk about them. Now, a crowd is a group that occupies the same piece of land but really has no particular connection to one another. And so they elbow and shove and go to and fro until the strongest win and others are left behind. A community is a

group of people who occupy the same piece of land and recognize their obligations to one another, people who believe they're going up or down together, people who believe they should help protect children and do honor to the elderly and help people make the most of their own lives, people who believe in freedom and responsibility, people who believe that we have an obligation to find common ground and sometimes to do the right thing because it's right, even if it's unpopular in the short run.

And in this period of change, as we move out of an industrial to an information society, out of the cold war into the global economy, that is what we need more than ever before, the values of your family and your community and your work.

The work of the Hispanic Caucus has never been more important than it is today, because you have stood for the values that are the very heart of the Latino culture and the very best of America. Some seek to divide us by spreading fear and laying blame. But the Hispanic Caucus has always sought to unite us all in America. I have counted on your support, literally from everything from A to Z, from affirmative action to zero tolerance gun policies in our schools.

The Hispanic Caucus has been my partner in 3 years of hard-won progress. When I became President, we had a stagnant and suffering economy. When I proposed a remedy to drive down this terrible deficit and increase investment in our people and in our economy and in our future, the naysayers who turned away said it would wreck the economy. But with the help of the Hispanic Caucus we passed an economic policy, and after 3 years, they were wrong and we were right.

We have 7.3 million new jobs, 2½ million new homeowners. Secretary Cisneros has a plan that will take home ownership above two-thirds of the American people by the year 2000 for the first time in American history. We have the largest number of new small businesses incorporated in any 2½-year period in American history, about 2 million. We have the largest number of new self-made millionaires in any 2½-year period in American history, and we have

the lowest combined rate of unemployment and inflation in nearly three decades.

The Hispanic Caucus helped this administration to tackle the problem of crime. When I showed up here, for 6 years Washington rhetoric had paralyzed the crime bill while everybody made speeches about it. We broke through that rhetoric and the partisan discord and passed a crime bill at a time when most Americans believed that nothing, nothing, could really be done about the crime problem. Our crime bill put more police officers on our street. It did punish serious criminals more, but it also gave our young people something to say yes to. And in every State in the country now, in virtually every urban area, the crime rate is down, the murder rate is down.

I was in Jacksonville, Florida, last week, and I saw that for the first time, people really believed that crime could go down in their neighborhoods, as they saw these police officers that we have put on the street. Again, we did it in the face of intense partisan opposition, but you were right, and I thank you. And America is a safer place tonight because of the leadership of the Hispanic Caucus.

Last year at the Summit of the Americas, we saw what a vital role Hispanic-Americans can play as we expand trade with all of Latin America, through NAFTA and the free trade area we agreed on by the year 2005. When Mexico got in trouble, so many of you stood by my side in what had the least popular support of anything I think I've done since I've been President.

But think what would have happened if we had not gone to Mexico's aid. Look what was happening in Mexico. Look what was happening in Argentina. Look what was happening in Brazil. Look what would have happened in terms of illegal immigration, in terms of political discord, in terms of economic dislocation. Maybe those of you who stood with me were part of only 15 percent approval of the policy at the time, but when the President of Mexico gets here in the next week or in the next couple of weeks for his state visit, we will see a Mexico coming back in the right direction, moving toward constructive partnership with the United States, with a future that we can be hopeful about, instead of one we can rue, because of you and your leadership. And I thank you for that.

I also thank you for your support for our policies designed to improve the security and prosperity and advance the values of the American people around the world. It is no longer possible in this global society to talk about domestic and foreign policy; they're all blurred. And I thank you for your support in policies that have led us to the point where I can say that for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age there are now no foreign missiles pointed at the people of the United States of America.

I thank you for our efforts to make peace in Haiti and Northern Ireland and for the celebration we will have tomorrow on the next step on the road to peace in the Middle East. I thank you for the work we have done to bring a genuine peace in Bosnia. And one of your members, of course, I must thank specifically, because through his combination of energy and imagination, heart and diplomacy, he has helped time and time again to make the world a safer place, Congressman Bill Richardson. Thank you.

On Friday, I will have the honor of acknowledging the work of another great American when I present the family of Willie Velasquez with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the land. I wish he could be here tonight to see how much he has helped citizenship to bloom among Hispanic-Americans throughout this country.

I also want to say a special word of thanks to the Hispanic-Americans who have helped to enrich the work of our administration. Beginning with Henry Cisneros and Federico Pena and the Latinos who have been appointed to the Federal District and Circuit Court of Appeals, those who occupy senior levels in Government in both categories, considerably more than any previous administration. You have proved, as I said in my speech on affirmative action, that excellence and diversity can go hand in hand; they must go hand in hand. And if they do, that is our ticket to a very, very bright future.

I thank those from my administration who are here tonight, including Gil Casellas, Norma Cantu, Maria Echaveste, Nelson Diaz, George Munoz, Aida Alvarez, Fernando Torres-Gil, Katherine Archuleta, Jack Otero; the people from the White House who have been wonderful to be part of my family, Janet Murguia, Suzanna Valdez, Carolyn Curiel, Ray Martinez, Alfred Ramirez, Liz Montoya, and Grace Garcia, my advance person who got me in here tonight.

I couldn't get around without her anymore. I thank her. I also want to thank someone who recently left the White House, Isabelle Rodriguez Tapia, who was the Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of Advance for both the First Lady and for me. All of these people and so many others are a part of what America is in its Government. And this is terribly important.

As we look at this balanced budget, I ask you to think about the people, the values, the vision you have for the future. It's really about values. Should we balance the budget? Of course, we should. Of course, we should. We never had a permanent deficit, never, until the 12 years before I come to Washington. We never had one before. And lest anyone blame any one party or the other, I would remind you that in 11 of those 12 years, the Congress appropriated less money, not more, than the President asked for. This was not a partisan thing, but Presidents have a responsibility to lead. And thanks to the efforts of many of you here, we reduced our Government deficit from \$290 billion to \$160 billion, a 40 percent reduction in 3 years, the first time since President Truman that had been done.

So, should we balance the budget? Of course, we should. Otherwise we will spend more and more of your money on paying interest on the debt, and we'll have less to spend on the things that make us strong and good and give us a better future. Otherwise we will take too much money at interest rates that are too high away from the business community in America that needs to borrow that money to generate jobs in the private sector, which is where we're trying to grow our future.

But the question is, how should we do this, and don't we have to do it in a way that is consistent with our most fundamental values, with work and family, with responsibility, with our obligations to the elderly and to our children, with our obligations to help those who cannot help themselves through no fault of their own, and perhaps to stop helping those who can help themselves just as well without it? What are we going to do? How are we going to do this?

Let me just offer a few observations. I don't think it is consistent with our values to balance the budget by reducing the number of college scholarships and more affordable college loans or by depriving hundreds of thousands of little

children who happen to be poor the chance to get off to a good start in school or by depriving schools of the chance to have smaller classes and computers in the classroom and meet the higher standards that we're holding out for them, just because the districts happen to be poor.

Why are we trying to balance the budget to strengthen America's future? We cannot strengthen America's future in a global economy, where what we earn depends on what we can learn, by weakening our commitment to education at the moment we should be strengthening that commitment to education. And let me say this as an aside: neither should we use the balanced budget as an excuse just to go after things that we do not like and cannot find a more open way to deal with.

And I want to just say a word in that context about bilingual education. Of course, English is the language of the United States. Of course, it is. That is not the issue. The issue is whether children who come here, while they are learning English, should also be able to learn other things. The issue is whether American citizens who work hard and pay taxes and are older and haven't mastered English yet should be able to vote like other citizens. The issue, in short, is not whether English is our language; it is. The issue is whether or not we're going to value the culture, the traditions of everybody and also recognize that we have a solemn obligation every day in every way to let these children live up to the fullest of their God-given capacities. That's what this is about.

Look at the balanced budget on the tax issue. Can we afford to reduce taxes and balance the budget? I believe we can. But we should do it consistent with our values. We should not cut taxes more than we can afford to do and provide our other obligations and meet them. And we should focus tax relief on the most important and most stressed things in our society, the need that middle class families have to get help with raising their children and to get help with financing the cost of education after high school. That's what we ought to do.

And the last thing we ought to do is what is now proposed, unbelievably, by the congressional majority. They want to raise the family tax credit by \$40 billion. One of the most important things we did in 1993 with our economic proposal was to give over 14 million working families who lived on modest incomes a reduc-

tion in their income taxes to send out two very important messages: Number one, this country should never favor welfare over work. And number two, if someone is working 40 hours a week and they have children in their home, they should not live in poverty because of a tax system. We must not reverse that. How in the world—how in the world anyone could justify cutting the taxes of someone in my income group and raising the taxes on working mothers with children who have an income of \$11,500 a year is beyond me. It is wrong, and we must stop it. We must not permit it to be done.

And let me say this: There's a lot of budget balancing to be done in the name of welfare reform. This administration has given 35 States the right to get out from under various Federal rules and regulations, to do more to move people from welfare to work. But what is our objective with welfare reform? It is to see people who are poor who may have made some mistakes in their lives have the chance to live good, strong, pro-work, pro-family lives. Our objective is to look at the reality of America where most parents work and most parents have to work and to say what we want is for everybody who can work to work, but we also want people to succeed as parents, for that is still our most important job.

And we must do both those things with welfare reform. Therefore, I say to you, it's all right to be very tough in child support enforcement. The Congress has adopted my provisions because there aren't any that are tougher. It is all right to be strong in saying you must, if you can, be in school or be in a training program or take a job when it is offered. And it is good that the Congress seems to be willing now to give some funds for child support so that you don't have to neglect your children if you go to work and you're poor. But it is wrong to use this as an excuse to punish people just because they're poor or they made a mistake or they happen to be children who, through no fault of their own, are in the family they're in.

Democratic, Republican Governors, the Catholic Church, they've all helped us to try to take some of these extreme provisions out of the welfare reform debate. And I say we have to keep them out. And let's remember, what we want is for people to be able to work and raise their children with dignity in this country. That is the purpose of welfare reform.

Finally, let me just give you one last example. There's a lot of talk about Medicare and Medicaid. We have to slow the rate of inflation in those programs. If we don't, they will soon be taking virtually all the discretionary money of the Government. We won't have money to invest in education or Secretary Pena's infrastructure programs that can put people back to work and rebuild communities. So we do have to do that.

It is true that the Medicare Trust Fund needs help. But the trustees that are so often cited by the congressional majority say that it costs \$90 billion to fix the Medicare Trust Fund for more than a decade. That money comes from slowing the reimbursement rates to medical providers. Their proposal to double the premiums, double the deductibles, stop giving Medicare to anybody under 67 years old, to raise 3 times as much as it takes to bail out the Trust Fund has nothing to do with saving Medicare; it has everything to do with funding their budget priorities.

My priorities say, we owe it to the elderly not to do that to them. Most of them have very limited incomes. The average senior lady in the country, a woman over 65 living alone, is living on less than \$9,000 a year average. In many States, 75 percent of those folks are living on less than \$7,500 a year. They cannot afford to have their premiums and deductibles doubled. It is wrong. It is not necessary. And we should not do it.

And finally, let me say just a word about the Medicaid program. It's not popular to stand up for poor children anymore, but the Medicaid program, two-thirds of that money in Medicaid goes to the elderly and the disabled Americans of this country. It pays for their nursing home care, for in-home care to avoid the costs of going to nursing homes, and for hospital care. About a third of the money goes to the poor children of America to pay for their medical bills. And a lot of that money goes to hospitals in big cities and isolated rural areas.

And if you take a third of that money away over the next 7 years, 3 times as much as I have recommended in my balanced budget plan, there is no way you will not do grievous harm to the elderly, the disabled, and the poorest, most vulnerable children in America. And to all those who say, "Well, I'd rather have mine now; I don't care about them," just remember, those children will be, will be, the adults of

the future. And we—those in my age group—will be depending on those kids to take care of us when we are retired. We are a family. We better act like a family. We cannot afford to do these things that violate our family values.

Lastly, let me say how very proud I am that the Hispanic Caucus mirrors these values every day in their work. And let me encourage all of you who may be discouraged by what I have just said—and I left a lot of things out. They also have proposed, for example, that if an elderly couple has one of—the husband or the wife needs to go into the nursing home, they've proposed letting States require the one that's not in a nursing home to have to sell their house, their car, and clean out their bank accounts before the one who's in the nursing home can get any kind of help. I don't think that's right, either.

My idea of the America of the 21st century is a high-opportunity country where everybody has a chance to live up to the fullest of their ability. I do not want my child to get ahead by driving elderly people into poverty. That is not my idea of family values. That is not the right thing to do.

Now, I want to ask all of you, without regard to your political party or where you live or what your income is, in these next few weeks to urge the Congress to live by the values of Hispanic America, to decide by the values of Hispanic America, to lift up work and family, to work for more freedom and responsibility, to remember our obligations to our children and to our parents, and to remember the future belongs to the United States if we can just remember that we're a community, not a crowd.

Look at America and imagine what the world's going to be like in 20 or 25 years, the global economy, people moving around, technology, ideas, information moving around. There is no country in this world as well-suited to seize the 21st century as the United States, if we will just remember how we got to where we are: by being a community, not a crowd.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Giselle Fernandez, NBC News correspondent, and the late Willie Velasquez, founder, Southwest Voter Registration Education Project.

## Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization September 28, 1995

### *Middle East Peace Process*

Q. Mr. Chairman, do you think this will lead to a Palestinian state, this signing today?

*Chairman Arafat.* The most important thing, it will lead to a permanent and just solution and peace in the Middle East.

Q. But will it lead to a Palestinian state? You want a Palestinian state; you want a capital in Jerusalem. Is this a step in that direction?

*Chairman Arafat.* And we have expressed our—from the first day, we were talking with the Israelis, even during the Sadat period, when he was making his invitation with Mr. Begin.

Q. Mr. Chairman, are you worried about another outbreak of terrorism in the wake of this agreement, as there have been in the past? Are you worried about another outbreak of terrorism?

*Chairman Arafat.* Look, there are many enemies against this, the peace process, and for this, we call it “the peace of the braves.” And we are in need of all our efforts and this extensive help to overcome all of these obstacles, including the terror and the oppositions on the two sides.

Q. Have you solved all the problems with the Israelis, particularly the date for a military pullout from—

*Chairman Arafat.* Yes, the last one has been informed to us from Mr. Dennis on the phone. And there is—there was a contact with Abu Alaa when we were in the meeting with His Excellency, Prime Minister Major, which were the most important points which had been changed—

Q. But all the issues have been solved?