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Remarks to the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts

September 19, 2000

Well, first of all, let me say thank you for the welcome. I thank the members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus who are here and other Members of Congress and the people from our administration who are here. I want to thank Jimmy Smits and Felix Sanchez. And I want to congratulate your honorees, Sara Martinez Tucker and the Hispanic Scholarship Fund for 25 years of service. I want to say a special word of appreciation to all the Latinos who have been part of our administration, including Maria Echaveste, Mickey Ibarra, Brian Barretto, Aida Alvarez, Bill Richardson, and all the others.

Let me say, I'm sorry I'm not in proper attire tonight. [*Laughter*] But Jimmy Smits called me this afternoon, and I only had two other things I was supposed to do, and so he said I had to show. [*Laughter*] And I want you to know I am here in spite of the fact that Jimmy Smits called me. [*Laughter*] And I'll tell you why. If I have to hear Hillary say one more time, "That is the best looking man I have ever seen," I think I will die.

So, right before I was here, I went over to the Kennedy Center. And there's a magnificent event at the Kennedy Center that Kerry Kennedy Cuomo is having about her book on human rights activists, and artists from all over our country and human rights heroes from all over the world are over there tonight. And so, I went from there to a book party for my friend Paul Begala. And I'm on my way over here, and everybody wanted to know where I was going. And this NBC television reporter said, "Jimmy Smits, that's the best looking man I ever saw in my life." [*Laughter*]

So, I said, "Well, what can I tell you? I've been to war for 8 years now, and I don't look very good anymore." [*Laughter*] He will never forgive me for embarrassing him like that. [*Laughter*]

I want to say something seriously. Felix, I appreciate what you have done so much with this foundation. And I want to say, I made fun of Jimmy Smits tonight, but I want you to know that becoming a friend of his has been one of the real joys of being President. He has been so kind to my wife and to me, to our family. He's been to the White House many times, and he's always been there for a good cause. And I hope you'll forgive me for pulling your leg tonight, Jimmy, but I'll never forget you for being our friend. Thank you very much.

I want to thank the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts for giving young people a chance. From the silver screen to the Broadway stage, kids with talent and dreams need a chance. That's what we've tried to do for 8 years now for all America's children. And the Vice President and I owe those of you who have done so much to help us do that a profound debt of gratitude, and I thank you.

Tonight I came mostly just to do that, just to say thank you, for all you do for the arts, for all you do for the Hispanic community, and for all you've done to help America move forward in the last 8 years. We now have the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate we've ever recorded, the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in a generation, a million new homeowners in the last 6 years. The earned-income tax credit has been doubled, and it's lifted over a million Hispanics out of poverty. The minimum wage helped 1.6 million Hispanic workers, and it's time to raise it again and help more.

The Hispanic Education Action Plan to encourage Hispanic youth to stay in school and go to college, along with our scholarship initiatives and other things, have contributed to the fact that the college-going rate among Hispanic young people is up over 50 percent in the last 7 years. And—listen to this—a report which was issued last week said there has been a 500 percent increase in the number of Hispanic students taking advance placement courses in high school to prepare for college.

Under the Vice President's leadership, we've reduced the naturalization backlog at INS. And under Aida Alvarez's leadership, loans to Hispanic entrepreneurs by the SBA have increased by 250 percent.

We have all been enriched by your work. And I know that because of your work, we'll have more great singers, more great writers, more great actors and actresses. I know we've

got a long way to go, too, because still Latino characters are only about 3 percent of those that appear on prime-time television. I just left Rita Moreno, and I told her that I enjoyed watching her as a nun on her television series. [*Laughter*] And we were laughing about it. And I think that you will see, if you keep working, though, more and more of our movies and our television shows and our Broadway shows reflecting the rich diversity of America.

And that's the last point I want to make. I have said on many occasions, and I'll just say one more time tonight, that if I could have only one wish for America, believe it or not, it would not be for a continued unbroken economic prosperity. It would be that somehow we would find the wisdom to live together as brothers and sisters, to truly be one America across all the lines that divide us.

And to—just sort of a little picture of how fast America has changed; you may see the advertisements today for—they're on television now—for Denzel Washington's new movie about the integration of T.C. Williams High School over in Alexandria, Virginia, and its football team, which occurred—what—almost 40 years ago, not such a long time ago once you've reached my age, anyway. [*Laughter*] Now, a little over three decades later, that high school is in a school district which has students from over 180 different racial and ethnic groups, parents speaking over 100 different native languages. It's the most diverse school district in America.

And I think it's sort of fitting that this movie, coming out in the new millennium, talks about something that to most of these kids is ancient history, that we hope they'll never forget. But it's sobering to look at the profile of them and realize that they are both the great opportunity and the great challenge of the future: Can we figure out a way to give them all a world-class education, with all their diversity? Can we figure out a way to make sure that every single child, every family, every faith in America is profoundly proud of its roots, understands them, and yet believes deep in the core of being that our common humanity is even more important than our unique characteristics? These are very big questions.

Not so long ago, a number of you in this room came to the White House for a showing of *"Mi Familia,"* the movie. Remember, you saw it; you were there. And so I was thinking about that tonight and feeling sort of nostalgic. And I think the central question that all of us have to ask ourselves, both within and beyond our borders now, is who is in our family anyway?

There is an astonishing new book out, been out a few months, by a man named Robert Wright, called "Non Zero," kind of a weird title unless you're familiar with game theory. But in game theory, a zero-sum game is one where, in order for one person to win, somebody has to lose. A non-zero-sum game is a game in which you can win, and the person you're playing with can win, as well. And the argument of the book is that, notwithstanding all the terrible things that happened in the 20th century—the abuses of science by the Nazis, the abuses of organization by the Communists, all the things that continue to be done in the name of religious or political purity—essentially, as societies grow more and more connected, and we become more interdependent, one with the other, we are forced to find more and more non-zero-sum solutions. That is, ways in which we can all win.

And that's basically the message I've been trying to preach for 8 years here, that everybody counts; everybody deserves a chance; we all do better when we help each other. We have to have an expanding idea of who is in our family. And we in the United States, because we're so blessed, have particular responsibilities to people not only within our borders who have been left behind but beyond our borders who otherwise will never catch up if we don't do our part, because we are all part of the same human family and because, actually, life is more and more a non-zero-sum game, so that the better they do, the better we'll do.

Now, I believe, because of the history and culture, because of the pain and the promise of the Hispanic community in the United States, you are uniquely qualified to make sure America learns this lesson now.

And so that's the last thing I'd like to say from the heart. You have made being President this last 8 years a joy. It has been an

honor for me to work with so many of you. If our country is better off because of anything I did, I am grateful. But all the best stuff is still out there if we can learn to preserve what is special about us and our clan, our tribe, and our faith, and do it while affirming our common humanity. Do that for America, and the best is still out there.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 p.m. at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to actor Jimmy Smits; Felix Sanchez, president and founder, National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts; Sara Martinez Tucker, president and chief executive officer, National Hispanic Scholarship Fund; and actress Rita Moreno. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the Church of God in Christ Bishops Convention

September 20, 2000

The President. Thank you. Well, if I had any sense at all, I would quit while I'm ahead. [*Laughter*] I know I'm not running for anything this year; otherwise, I would never agree to speak behind all those folks. [*Laughter*]. Bishop Owens and Bishop Smith and Bishop Brooks, Bishop Haynes. Let me say hello to Bishop Clark, the General Board of Bishops. I thank the choir. I was pretty transported during all that, weren't you?

Audience members. Yes, sir.

The President. If I could sing like that lady, I'd have been in a different line of work. [*Laughter*]

I want to say a special word of thanks to Bishop Walker, who has been my friend for so many years, and his colleague in Arkansas, Bishop Lindsey. I hope the Lord won't think it's sacrilegious, but in a figurative way, they helped raise me from the political dead 18 years ago. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here today. And I thank them for that.

I also want to say how grateful I am to those in our administration who have helped me to work with you—Ben Johnson, who is here. You mentioned Alvin Brown, representing the Vice President. He also represented all those empowerment zones, where we've created jobs for people who have been left out and left behind. The Vice President and I thank him for that.

And I, too, want to pay special privilege to the man, Bishop Owens, who was where you are now when I started. Bishop Ford—I loved him. He was my friend, and I'm honored to see you, sir.

In Timothy, it is written that, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Now, I thought I would come here and talk about that, because unlike me, you aren't term-limited—[*laughter*]—except, of course, in the sense that we are all term-limited.

And so as we pass through this fleeting life, I wanted most of all to thank you for your good work. I want to thank you for your friendship to me and to Hillary and to Chelsea, for sticking with our family through thick and thin, and for being a part of America's family as we have moved forward.

It seems hard to believe it's been almost 10 years since I spoke to about 20,000 members of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, at the convention. Then, Bishop Owens and I were reminiscing. I went back to Memphis, to the Mason Temple in 1993, to speak where Dr. King delivered his last sermon. And as he pointed out, some people thought it was my best sermon as President. [*Laughter*] In 1996 I addressed the Women's Convention in New Orleans.

We've had a wonderful relationship, a friendship, a partnership. And much of what has been said today has been deeply personal, and for that I am grateful. But I think it's worth remembering that you do your jobs, and I have done mine, not primarily for the personal but for the others, that we are supposed to be serving. And if we take a hit now and again along the way, that's just part of the cost of service.

And the Scripture says we should simply not grow weary; that in due season, we shall reap. I have to admit, there were times when I thought the winters were too long, and I thought we'd never get to the reaping part. [*Laughter*]

But we have. We have the longest economic expansion in our history, and we've all been a part of it. We have the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest violent crime