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35 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 2000

Source: [All Sources](#) : / . . . / : [Presidential Documents](#)Terms: [headline \(hispanic! and remarks\)](#) and [date geq \(05/23/1990\)](#) ([Edit Search](#))*Public Papers of the Presidents*

Public Papers of the Presidents

October 9, 1999

CITE: 35 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 2000**LENGTH:** 3254 words**HEADLINE:** Remarks to the United States **Hispanic** Leadership Institute Conference in Chicago, Illinois**BODY:**

Thank you. Good morning. You know, I was a little sleepy before I came in here and saw you. [Laughter] And I'm ready to go now. I thank you very much.

Let me begin by saying a simple thank you. Thank you for your friendship; thank you for your support; thank you for bringing all of the children who are here in this audience today to remind us of what our deliberations are all about. Thank you, Juan Andrade, for your long leadership and your friendship to me. And thank you, Rey Gonzalez.

Thank you for bringing the Juan Andrade Scholarship award winners outside for me to have my picture taken with them. I enjoyed that. They were great. People who are worried about America should take a look at those young people. They would worry a lot less and feel a lot more hope.

I want to express my appreciation to everyone at the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute for working since 1982 on your noble mission of empowerment through education and voter participation. Your work has paid off. You see it in greater Hispanic participation in elections and in the growing number of Latino elected officials, like Congressman Luis Gutierrez. I think he is here today, and I thank him for his work.

I also want to thank the many dedicated Hispanic members of our administration, including my Deputy Chief of Staff, Maria Echaveste, who is here; our Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mickey Ibarra; the EEOC Chair, Ida Castro -- I know she has been or will be on your program -- along with George Munoz, Aida Alvarez, Henry Solano, Saul Ramirez, and Secretary Bill Richardson, and a number of other young people in our administration who I've seen wandering around here at your meeting, and some of whom have worked on my trip here.

Let me say that there is another mission that you have followed over the years. You have helped to forge unity among the diverse elements of Hispanic America. You remind us that there are actually differences of ethnicity, national origin, and even, occasionally, of opinion among Hispanic-Americans; but that you are united by common values of faith and family, hard work, and a common vision of a better America. That is America at its best -- a diverse nation, now the most diverse in our history, and growing increasingly so.

In a global economy, in a global society, our diversity can be a godsend if we make the most of it, if we enjoy it, if we respect it, if we honor it, and if we believe that the common humanity that unites

us is more important than all the differences among us. That thought was uppermost in my mind 6 1/2 years ago when I became President.

Vice President Gore and I came into office determined to move away from the divide-and-conquer politics which had dominated our country for the previous 12 years. It had weakened and divided America, and it was wrong. We wanted to find a way to unify our country, to unify our thinking, to unify our action, and to move our country forward, based on values all Americans share -- opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all our people. With that in mind, we put in place a new economic plan, new crime and welfare policies, new education, environment, and health policies, new policies to empower the poor and elevate citizen service. I think the results speak for themselves.

We have the longest peacetime economic expansion in history; the highest homeownership in history; the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years; the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years; the lowest poverty rates in 20 years; the lowest crime rates in 26 years; the smallest Federal Government in 37 years; the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years. Along the way we managed to pass the family and medical leave law, which has given millions and millions of Americans the right to take some time off when a baby is born or a parent is sick without losing their jobs. Ninety percent of our children are immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in our history. Our air and water are cleaner; our food is safer. We have opened the doors of college with the HOPE scholarship and other increases in financial aid. We have opened the doors of health care to 5 million children; 100,000 young Americans have served in AmeriCorps.

Just last week we learned that median household income rose 3 1/2 percent last year, but for Hispanics it rose at an even faster rate of 4.8 percent in one year. Even though this community has serious challenges, including, I might say uppermost, a high school dropout rate that is too high, we now have the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate in history, the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in a generation, and a million new Hispanic homeowners since 1994.

In 1993 we doubled the earned-income tax credit for lower income working people. It now lifts over a million Hispanics out of poverty. We raised the minimum wage that directly benefits 1.6 million Hispanic workers, and I think it's time we raised the minimum wage again.

We increased the number of Small Business Administration loans to Hispanic entrepreneurs by 250 percent. We thank Aida Alvarez for her leadership there. And as the Vice President recently announced, the SBA has planned to expand lending to the Hispanic community even more. We revolutionized welfare in a way that allowed the rolls to be cut nearly in half -- millions of people to move from dependence to the dignity of work, what with more child care, more transportation aid, guaranteed food and medicine to children, and we have succeeded in reversing the unfair cuts in the welfare reform law, restoring benefits to over 600,000 legal immigrants.

Under the Vice President's leadership, we've reduced the naturalization backlog at INS, streamlining the process to make it easier for immigrants who play by the rules to become full partners in America. We have more to do, and I ask you to help us with that.

I'd also like to ask your help with one other thing. In the 1997 bipartisan balanced budget bill, we created the \$ 24 billion Children's Health Insurance Program. It was the largest expansion of children's health coverage since the enactment of Medicaid. It required all the States to file plans to use this money to enroll children without health insurance in the program. This year we finally got all the States enrolled. But the alarming thing is that we estimate there are at least -- at least -- 4 million more children who could be covered by the money that is there waiting for them to provide health insurance who have not signed up yet.

So I ask you, when you go back home, make sure that in your community there is a systematic effort underway to get health care to every Hispanic child who doesn't have it, who is eligible for this program.

Like you, I believe in the concept of empowerment, so I will mention this one last issue. I asked the

Vice President to lead our efforts to create over 100 enterprise zones and empowerment communities across our country, to generate billions of dollars in new private sector investment and public investment in these low income areas. You can see them operating from Chicago to Philadelphia to Cleveland to Detroit to south Texas to the Mississippi Delta to Appalachia. And you can see them working. I have asked for an increase in the number of empowerment zones and community development banks, and we're fighting for them now in the budget.

I want to talk to you about what we're going to do next. I thank you for your support. I am pleased by the progress we have made. But in America we must always be determined to change, to improve, to move forward. And we must honestly face the fact that there are still a lot of challenges out there that have not been met.

When I came up on this stage -- I'll just give you one example -- when I came up on this stage, one of the people back here said, "Mr. President, there are some people in our community with disabilities who are out there. Be sure and say hello to them on the way out." One of the important things I'm trying to get passed in this Congress is a bill sponsored by Senator Kennedy and Senator Jeffords which would allow people with disabilities to move into the workplace and still keep their Medicaid insurance because they can't get health insurance in the workplace. That's the sort of thing we need to be doing.

I ask you to take just a few minutes and focus on the outstanding challenges -- places where we haven't made enough progress and places where we haven't received enough co-operation from this Congress. Let me begin with judicial nominations.

I am proud that we have succeeded in appointing more Hispanics to the Federal bench than any administration in history. And I'm proud that, on the whole, the judges I've appointed are the most diverse group in our history -- nearly half are women or minorities. More than half my current judicial nominees are women or minorities, and they are good judges. My appointees have garnered the highest ratings from the American Bar Association of any President in 40 years.

Now, I would also say that unlike previous administrations, there has been article after article after article saying that I have avoided putting ideological extremists on the court, unlike what happened in the previous decade or so. So these people are well-qualified, they're diverse -- you would think the United States Senate would be falling all over themselves to confirm them.

Now, let's look at the facts. Earlier this week I said it was a disgrace that the Senate defeated on a straight party-line vote my nomination of Ronnie White, a highly talented African-American jurist from the State of Missouri that was the first African-American to serve on the Missouri State Supreme Court, who was endorsed by one of his State's Republican Senators, supported by Republican Senators on the Judiciary Committee, but when he came to the floor, for political reasons back in Missouri, 100 percent of the Republicans in the majority voted to deny his confirmation and distorted his record in capital punishment appeals cases. It was wrong. That's the kind of thing that's going on up there that ought to stop.

But unfortunately, it's not an isolated event. Listen to this: Richard Paez, the first Mexican-American ever to serve as a judge in the Federal District Court in Los Angeles, I nominated more than 3 1/2 years ago for a seat on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. For more than 3 1/2 years he has been waiting for the Senate to confirm his nomination. Is it because he's not qualified? No. The American Bar Association said not that he was qualified, but that he was well qualified. He received the highest rating from the ABA. He has broad, bipartisan support back in California and in the legal community. Yet, he still has not been given a Senate floor vote. Why? Well, they don't want to vote him down because they hope that you will vote with them in the next election, but they don't want to vote for him. So this man has been hanging there for 3 1/2 years.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I took 3 1/2 years to make a decision, you wouldn't think I was a very good President. And most of you couldn't hold your jobs if you took 3 1/2 years to do your assigned tasks. Can you imagine that? How many times has somebody been on you because you took 3 1/2 hours? [Laughter]

Another fine candidate for the Ninth Circuit, a renowned appellate lawyer, Marsha Berzon, has been waiting for more than 18 months to receive a floor vote. That is, they put these people out of committee and they just never bring them up. They just disappear somewhere in the dark recesses of the calendar of the Senate. Now, I think the treatment of Richard Paez and Marsha Berzon is shameless.

We have also been working to get three other exceptional Hispanic nominees confirmed: Judge Julio Fuentes for the Third Circuit; civil lawyer Enrique Moreno for the Fifth Circuit; and Judge Ronald Guzman for the Northern District of Illinois, here.

I am pleased to announce that Judge Guzman finally received his judiciary committee hearing last week for a vacancy here. But the Senate's treatment of Judge White and its failure to vote on the outstanding Hispanic nominees that are pending creates a real doubt about their ability and their willingness to perform their constitutional duties to advise and consent.

So I urge you to help me get a Senate vote on Judge Paez, Judge Fuentes, Judge Guzman, Marsha Berzon, Enrique Moreno. They should be confirmed. They should be confirmed. But they ought to be voted on one way or the other.

Now, let me say, in spite of the difficulties we have had with this Congress, they're capable of putting partisanship aside and putting the country first. We did it on the third try with the welfare bill in '96. We did it with the Balanced Budget Act in '97. We did it last year when they voted right before the election for my program to put 100,000 teachers in the schools. And just last week, at the end of this session that just concluded, finally, after 2 years of work, a substantial bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives passed a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights.

Now, that bill is a long way from becoming law, but a lot of people never thought we could get this far. It gives you the right if you're in an HMO to see a specialist if your doctor says you should; to go to the nearest emergency room if you're in an accident; to keep your doctor through a course of treatment, whether for chemotherapy or a pregnancy; and to hold your health care plan accountable if you're injured.

So we're capable of doing this. I have asked the Congress to do more. I have asked them to keep our prosperity going by paying down our debt and getting America out of debt in 15 years for the first time since 1835. We can do that.

I have asked them to keep working until the prosperity of this moment reaches every community and every person willing to work for it. I have asked them to double the number of empowerment zones and enterprise communities. And I have asked them to adopt my new markets initiative, which would simply say we want the same incentives for people with money to invest in poor communities in America we give them to invest in poor communities around the world, because people in America deserve the chance to be a part of America's prosperity.

I've asked them to work with me to meet the challenge of the aging of America by saving Social Security and modernizing Medicare and adding a prescription drug benefit. I have asked them, now that we have the lowest crime rate in 26 years, to ask them to join me in making America the safest big nation on Earth by closing this gun show loophole in our background check law and doing more to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals.

I have asked them to help me give all of our children -- all of our children -- a world-class education, demanding more from our schools, but also investing more. Our agenda is clear: Build or modernize 6,000 schools; there are too many kids in the schools and too many schools are run down or too many kids going to school in trailers. Put 100,000 teachers out there and focus on the early grades to give our children smaller classes. Have more after-school and summer school programs like Chicago does, so that you can say, "Okay, we're going to have high standards; we're going to end social promotion, but we will not label children a failure when the systems fail them." We want them to have access to the help they need. Close the digital divide; hook up every classroom and every

library in this country to the Internet at a rate even the poorest schools can afford. That's what we're doing.

I am proud that we won almost \$ 500 million in the 1999 budget for the Hispanic education action plan, to make sure Latino children get the tutoring, the after-school, the mentoring programs they need to help them meet higher academic standards, finish, not drop out of high school, and go on to college.

It will take time for these efforts to have an impact, but you can help at the local level. Hold up these young scholarship winners as an example to the young people in your communities. We cannot make America what it ought to be in the 21st century unless we dramatically reduce the 30 percent dropout rate among Hispanic-American children.

As many of your leaders have told me, notwithstanding our best intentions in this administration, we have a lot more to do to make sure that the States and the school districts who accept Federal dollars actually spend those dollars in a way that reaches underserved Hispanic students, and we are working on that, as well.

Let me finally make this one point. I have always wanted an administration that looks like America. You've heard me say that a dozen times, I bet. More and more, America will look like you. More and more, there will be more people listening and more people performing like Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez. There will be more books. There will be more movies. There will be a bigger part of our culture.

And what I ask you to do as you rise in dominance and influence, not only in our political life but in our cultural life, is never to forget your roots and never forget the pain of discrimination or being ignored, and make sure that you are always a force for good, for building one America.

If you look around this old world today, the biggest problem I have faced as your President in my responsibilities around the world is dealing with the racial and the ethnic and the religious and the tribal conflicts where people occupy the same land and cannot get along; where they continue to believe what is different about them is more important than their common humanity; where they fear people who are different from them and get to the point where they look down on them and in some places -- God forbid -- they think it's even okay to kill them.

And if you look all over the world today, we celebrate the modern world -- modern music, modern culture, the Internet, the decoding of the human gene -- all these things that are going on. A lot of your young people probably want to go to work for these Internet companies, where there are dozens and dozens of young people in their twenties now worth \$ 50 million. That's chump change to some of them. It's all great, all this modern world, but don't forget the biggest problem is the oldest problem of the human heart -- the fear and hatred of people who are different.

So I ask you to remember this. You are growing in numbers; you are growing in influence. You will grow in ways that are good and will make America richer, more alive, more textured, more exciting. And it's all going to be positive. But don't forget what you've been through. And do everything you can to stop it from happening within America and beyond our borders. We are still, for all of our modern advances, too much in the grip of the oldest fears of the human heart. And your community can make all the difference for 21st century America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom at McCormick Place. In his remarks, he referred to Juan Andrade, Jr., president and executive director, and Rey Gonzalez, board chairman, U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute; singer Ricky Martin; and actress/singer Jennifer Lopez.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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30 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 344

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Public Papers of the Presidents

February 22, 1994

CITE: 30 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 344**LENGTH:** 1714 words**HEADLINE:** Remarks on Signing the Executive Order on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans**BODY:**

Thank you very much, Secretary Pena, Secretary Cisneros, all the people here from the Department of Education, along with Secretary Riley, including Norma Cantu and Gene Garcia, who have been recognized. When I was listening to my longtime friend Dick Riley up here speaking, I was thinking that this group could have forgiven me perhaps for putting someone in my Cabinet who spoke English with such a heavy accent. [Laughter] You know, sometimes people from South Carolina are hard for even the rest of us southerners to understand. I remember once when Senator Fritz Hollings from South Carolina was running for President and he was in a roast, and Senator Kennedy from Massachusetts spoke at the roast. And he said that he was glad to be there in honor of the first non-English-speaking American ever to seek the Presidency. He'll probably resign this afternoon -- [laughter].

We've had a wonderful day today, Dick Riley and I have, the kind of day we always wanted to have, fighting for better education in America. We were the Governors of our respective States together for a long time in the seventies and the eighties. We saw what education could do and what the lack of it could mean. And I want to thank him personally from the bottom of my heart for the extraordinary work that he has done as Secretary of Education.

This morning I started off the day by going jogging with about a dozen students from the Northern Virginia Community College, and it was interesting. Their average age, I'd say, was probably 26. One was a native of Peru; one a native of Iran, just became an American citizen; one a native of Sierra Leone; one a native of Scotland. And as a matter of fact, I think only 7 of the 12 were native-born to the United States.

Then I spoke to the American Council on Education and was on the platform with Juliet Garcia from the University of Texas at Brownsville and others today, and we had a terrific time. I want to thank her and all the rest of you who are here representing various organizations, including the Hispanic Education Coalition. I think I have you all down here: Laudelina Martinez, the president of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; those here from the National Council of La Raza; the National Puerto Rican Coalition; Aspira; also **MALDEF**; the Cuban American National Council; the National Association for Bilingual Education; the Association of Hispanic Federal Executives.

I'd also like to acknowledge the members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus who are here, including the chair, Congressman Jose Serrano; Congressman Bill Richardson from New Mexico -- and we thank you, sir, for your extraordinary Burmese mission dealing with Aung San Suu Kyi; all

America's proud of you for what you've done -- Congressman Ed Pastor; Congressman Robert Menendez; Congressman Carlos Romero-Barcelo; Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart; Congresswoman Lucille Roybal; Congressman Robert Underwood; Congressman -- is Solomon Ortiz here? I don't think so. I think that is everyone.

Those of you in this room, including many that I have not introduced, have been at the forefront in pressing for educational opportunity for Hispanic-Americans. It must have seemed sometimes a lonely cause. It is, today, an even more urgent cause than ever before. You are here today, in part, for me to say to you, you are not alone.

Our administration has embraced your cause and seeks to support it. We know that doors can be shut. We know that only about half of Hispanic-Americans complete high school; that between 1980 and 1991, Hispanic enrollment at institutions of higher education grew 84 percent but still lagged far behind the national average of enrollments. The percentage of Hispanics going to college is just about half of that from college students in other minority groups.

This is a complex problem. And finding solutions, therefore, can be deferred, as they often are with complex problems, or we can say, because the problems are difficult and complex, we should take even more aggressive action. I am determined that we must do the latter because we have to succeed. After all, in the next century, Hispanics will make up the largest minority group in our Nation. From this pool, we will draw many of our leaders, our educators, our work force, our future.

To ignore the barriers to educational opportunity only hampers our own future, as well as the future of Hispanic-Americans as individuals. If we fail the youngest and fastest growing segment of our population, we'll all fail. Therefore, we must do everything in our power to allow every American child to reach his or her full potential.

I believe and everyone in this administration believes that every child can learn and can achieve. We have set world-class goals in education, and we want to give our schools and communities the tools to achieve them. That is at the heart of our general initiatives on education, the Goals 2000 program, the school-to-work initiative, the reformation of the college loan program to lower the interest rates and string out the repayments so that all Americans can borrow money and then do work that they're proud to do, knowing that they will never be unduly burdened in paying back their loans. It's at the heart of the national service program. It's at the heart of the reemployment program, what we want to do in replacing the old unemployment system where people drew unemployment and waited for their old jobs to come back, when we know those jobs are not coming back. We now want a reemployment system so that the moment someone is unemployed, that man or woman can begin immediately, while drawing the unemployment, to engage in retraining to plan for a new and better job.

These are the things we want for all Americans. But we know we must do more if we are to achieve those goals for Hispanic Americans. And therefore, these goals are at the heart of the Executive order that I sign today.

I know that all of you here have heard of the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans; both previously existed. But we also know, from months of working closely with Hispanic groups including many of you here, that this administration needed to do more. Together with Hispanic leaders in education, civil rights, and business, we put our hearts and minds into finding the means to address the problems affecting the education of young Hispanic Americans. This Executive order is far-reaching. It is a commitment to education for all Americans.

First, the order establishes a commission that will be made up from leaders of the Hispanic American community. Using the national education goals, this commission will track how Hispanics are doing and recommend ways to improve performance. The commission will also look for ways to better involve Government and the private sector in helping Hispanic students to achieve these goals.

The order will also marshal together the resources of the Federal Government by using an

interagency working group. This is important because the problems in the education of young Latinos are tied to other areas, to poverty, to unemployment, to crime, to language barriers, to the breakdown of family, to name only a few. We need to address these problems in their entirety because that is the only way to make progress long-lasting. Agencies will set goals, and they will not get lost in a bureaucracy. Each executive department in every agency taking part will appoint a senior official to oversee their part of this program.

We will also move to increase Hispanic American participation in all Federal education programs. And every step of the way, we will continue to consult with the people and the organizations who have long been studying the education of Hispanics, and that includes many of you here today.

This Executive order expands on steps we have already taken for education. We propose an increase of \$ 700 million for the Title I provision and to increase the access to Title I funds for Hispanic children by removing a major obstacle, the requirement that a child have limited proficiency in English. We propose a 12 percent increase in funding for bilingual education. We proposed, as I said, direct student loans to lower the interest rates and the costs and ease the repayment of student loans. We have proposed a national service program, that has already passed, that this year will provide the opportunity for 20,000 and 3 years from now 100,000 young Americans to earn money against their higher education by performing service in their communities.

But we all know that with these best efforts Government can only provide part of the solution. We can only succeed if all of us take personal responsibility for our families, our communities, our educational institutions, and our countries. The ties of family have been a great strength in Hispanic America. These ties fortified by opportunity can nurture and keep a child on a straight and strong path going forward and upward through the generations. We have to continue to support that as well.

And now, I would like to sign this Executive order and ask Representative Serrano, representing the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, to come up. I see Representative Luis Gutierrez, from Illinois, here also. Did I miss anyone else in the caucus? I think I saw everyone else. You shouldn't hide your light under a bushel back there. *[Laughter]* I'd like to ask Norma Cantu, Juliet Garcia, Laudelina Martinez to join me, along with Raul Yzaguirre of La Raza, Luis Nunez from the National Puerto Rican Coalition, Mario Mareno from **MALDEF**, Gilbert Chavez from the Association of Hispanic Federal Employees, and Hilda Crespo from Aspira to come up; and we will sign the Executive order. Please come up.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:31 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Norma Cantu, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, and Eugene Garcia, Director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, Department of Education.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Ypsilanti, Michigan)

For Immediate Release

April 30, 2000

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO NAACP FIGHT FOR FREEDOM FUND DINNER

Cobo Convention Center

Detroit, Michigan

7:10 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Well -- I don't know what to say. I will tell you that this magnificent work of African art will be up in our residence at the White House before I go to bed tonight. I thank you for it.

Reverend Anthony, thank you for an introduction the likes I have never had and never will have again. Thank you for spreading the caring arms of this branch of the NAACP from East Grand Boulevard all the way to Africa. And thank you for being my true friend.

Thank you, all, ladies and gentlemen, for honoring Secretary Cuomo. I am delighted that he and his wife, Kerry, are here with me, and he deserves the honor you gave him. You know, he and Secretary Slater make me look good every day. And too often I get the credit when they deserve more. I thank them for being here.

I thank Thurgood Marshall, Jr. for being here; Maria Echaveste, all the people from the White House that prove the truth that we have given you an administration that looks like America. I thank all your elected representatives who are here for their support and solidarity with the NAACP. Thank you, Governor Engler, Senator Levin, Senator Abraham, Congressman Dingell, Congresswoman Kilpatrick. Congresswoman Stabenow, thank you for running and proving that you believe in democracy.

And thank you, thank you, thank you, my friend, John Conyers, and thank you for giving him the award that he so richly deserves.

Thank you, Mayor Dennis Archer, and thank you, Trudy, for being Hillary's friend and my friend for so many years. Long before you were a mayor, back when you were a judge and above such things as petty politics, we were friends. I have enjoyed watching the success of Detroit, and enjoyed helping on occasion you to contribute to it. I thank you all.

I bring you -- I also want to offer my condolences to the family and many friends of Bill Beckham, who passed away last week, who devoted his life to improving the lives of others in this great city. And I bring you greetings from two people who are not here -- the First Lady, Hillary, who said she wished she could be here, but she is otherwise occupied in New York tonight; and the Vice President, who is otherwise occupied somewhere in America tonight, who loved being here.

Now, I am told this is the largest sit-down dinner anywhere in the whole world. And I can honestly say, it's the only one I've ever attended that had four head tables -- (laughter) -- the only one I've ever attended when I didn't shake hands with everyone at the head tables -- (laughter) -- and I learned tonight that I was the first sitting President ever to attend this great banquet. I will say this: If this encounter gets anything like the press coverage it deserves, I am quite certain I will not be the last President to be at this banquet tonight.

More than anything else, I came tonight to say a simple thank you. Thank you for being my friends; thank you for being there for me, in good times and bad; thank you for being there in our journey to help American go forward together.

For more than 90 years now, the NAACP has been America's friend -- the conscience of a nation struggling and too often failing to live up to its ideals; challenging always all of us to look into the mirror, to face our faults and right our wrongs. I have proceeded these last seven years and seven months with a simple philosophy that I believe is your philosophy: I believe everybody counts, everybody should have a chance, everybody has a role to play, and we all do better when we help each other.

Dr. King once said our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. The NAACP has never been silent about the things that matter, and the life of this organization is just beginning. For all the progress we have made together, there is still much to do.

I am grateful for your support and the role you and your work have played in the progress we have made together for America. I am grateful that we have the lowest unemployment and welfare rates in 30 year; the lowest poverty rates in 20 years; the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded; the lowest female unemployment in 40 years; the highest home ownership in history; and the longest economic expansion in history. I am grateful for that.

I am grateful that under the Vice President's leadership, we've created empowerment zones in Detroit and many other cities; and set up community financial institutions to loan money to people that couldn't get loans otherwise; and done so many other things. I am grateful for that. I am grateful that we have a healing social fabric; that the homicide rate is the lowest in 30 years, and gun crime's down 35 percent, and adoption is up 30 percent. I am grateful for all of that. I am grateful that 21 million Americans have taken family and medical leave, and that 5 million families have benefited from our Hope Scholarship to help pay for college.

I am grateful that 150,000 young Americans, including at least one I saw here tonight, have served our country in AmeriCorps in their communities. I am grateful that over 90 percent

of our children are immunized for the first time from serious childhood diseases, and 95 percent of our schools are hooked up to the Internet, as compared to 16 percent when the Vice President and I set out to hook them all up six years ago. I'm grateful for all that.

I'm grateful that as Wendell said so much more eloquently than I could, we have appointed more minorities and women to more positions in the government and on the bench than any administration in history by a good long ways. I'm grateful for that.

I am profoundly touched by your prayers, your friendship and your support. I reminded Secretary Slater when Reverend Anthony was up here preaching -- (laughter) -- that I went home with him last week to a memorial service for Daisy Bates, the great Arkansas heroine of the civil rights movement who shepherded those nine children through Little Rock Central High School 43 years ago and who just died a few months ago. Daisy's minister, Reverend Rufus Young, who is a gentleman way up in his 80s, with a frail walk, with a strong voice, got up and looked up at me and he said, "Mr. President, the only reason you've survived is that so many of us black folks were praying for you so hard."

What I hope now is we will turn our prayers and energies toward tomorrow. For when people gather together, even though it's important to remember the past, in my wife's words, it's even more important to imagine the future. And I guess what I would like to ask you is, in this millennial election season, as a citizen -- forget about party, forget about anything else -- what do you as a human being believe that America should be doing.

I have waited a long time for my country to be in the position to create the future of our dreams for our children. I watched for a long time America just being paralyzed by these assumptions of what we could not do. When I got elected President, I think most people thought we could never get rid of the deficit, much less run a surplus. But we have. I think most people thought -- (applause) -- I think most people thought the crime rate would always go up and never go down. But it's gone down for seven years in a row now. I think most people thought that people on welfare didn't really want to work. But that turned out to be wrong -- almost 7 million have moved out of welfare. They were wrong about that.

I think most people thought a lot of things couldn't get better. And now we don't have any excuses, because we know when we get together and work together, things can get better. And so what I want to ask you is, what do you propose to do about it?

A great country can make mistakes not only when times are tough, but when times are good. I look out here in this sea of faces and I wonder how many thousand stories there are here tonight -- stories of triumph and heroism and struggle against the odds, to overcome some racial or economic or other handicap -- how many of you have lost a loved one to violence or other tragedies. And now, what I want to say to you is, we know things can be better -- what do you propose to do about it.

We have choices to make. I believe that we should keep on going with this economic recovery until we have brought economic opportunity to all those neighborhoods, all those little rural towns, all those Indian reservations, all those people who have still been left behind and

don't know there's been a recovery because they haven't felt it. And we can do it now in a way that we've never been able to do before.

I believe we should keep going until all of our children understand how to use computers and can make the most of it. I believe we should keep going until we find a way to guarantee health care rights to all Americans who are willing to work and do the right thing, or who need help because they can't. I believe we should keep going until every American who wants to can go to college.

Let me tell you something else a lot of people don't know. Even a lot of African Americans don't know this. Last year, for the first time in history, the percentage of African Americans graduating from high school equaled the percentage of the white majority children graduating from high school. Now, we ought to keep going until the percentage going on to college equals that, and then the percentage graduating. But we have to open the doors of college to everyone.

We've made a lot of progress, but we've got more to do. And we've got more to do in so many other areas. I just want to mention two more before I leave. One is, in this whole business of sharing the bounty of America's public service. You know, I never thought about this in the way my appointment of people of color, and lots of women, to important positions -- in the way most people think about it. I always figured we'd do a better job if our government was more representative of the rest of the people in the country. I always thought we would make better decisions. I always thought empowering people and communities was a positive good. I never thought it was something I was doing for somebody else -- I just thought I was trying to make democracy work.

And we made a lot of progress. But I want you to know, there's one real problem we've still got that directly affects Michigan. When it comes to appointing judges, the United States Senate is not doing what it ought to be doing, especially with regard to women and minority appointees.

Hey, I need your help on this. A blue ribbon study found that during the 105th Congress, women and minority judicial nominees took much longer to be considered than white males. They found that minority nominations failed at a much higher rate than the nominations of whites. Last year there was a disgraceful rejection of an African American state supreme court judge from Missouri named Ronnie White, solely on the basis of party politics.

I have nominated two people from Michigan to the 6th Circuit, and neither one of them have even gotten a hearing so far -- Judge Helene White, a highly qualified Michigan appellate judge, has been waiting for a hearing from the Senate Judiciary Committee for three years, longer than any other pending nominee.

My other 6th Circuit nominee, Kathleen McCree Lewis, the daughter of Wade McCree, is here tonight. She would become the first African American woman ever to serve on the 6th Circuit. I think the Senate ought to give Helene White and Kathleen McCree Lewis hearings.

Vote them up or down. Tell the American people how you stand. Let us hear from you. Don't hide behind having no hearing.

I had to work and work and work to get a distinguished Hispanic judge and a female attorney appointed out in California. They made him wait four years. Now, why did they do that? Because they didn't want to put him on the court. They just didn't want you to know they didn't want to put him on the court. So if you don't want to do something, but you don't want the people to know you don't want to do something, instead of saying no, you just never get around to it.

Now, we're going to have a new election in November. And we'll have a new President and a new Senate, and I hope a new House, with John as the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. But I want you to know this: I am proud of the fact that my party has never been guilty of delaying nominees to this extent and particularly putting the burden on women and people of color. And it's a shame, and we ought to do something about it. And I hope you'll help me do something about it.

Now, let me just mention one other thing, because we have lots of choices this year. You will have choices about whether to keep on changing in accord with this economic policy, and bringing everybody into it while we keep paying down the debt, investing in education, give families tax cuts we can afford, or going back to the economic policy we had before I came in, with even bigger tax cuts that, once I get out of office, would benefit primarily people like me. But we won't have any money for education and we'll start running deficits again.

We'll have choices about education policy, health policy, environmental policy, a lot of other things. But I want you to think about the things that we choose that really define us as a community. John Conyers talked about one. I'm proud that gun crime is down 35 percent. Anybody thinks that America is safe enough is free to walk out on my speech right now. But we know we can make America safer, and we know the best way to do it is by preventing crime in the first place. That's why we want to close the gun show loophole and do other things to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals. That's why we want more community police on the street. That's why we want more after-school and summer school programs for our kids, to give them something to say yes to.

But when three-quarters of the people in the penitentiary are people of color and they're more likely to be in the penitentiary than they are to go to college, there's something wrong still. I don't think we've done as much we can. I think we can make America safer and have more of our kids going to college at the same time. But we have a choice to make.

I think we ought to pass the hate crimes legislation. There are still people in this country who are shot, who are abused -- (applause) -- who are killed because of their race, their religion, just because they're gay. We've seen it over and over again -- tragically. We saw it just this week -- five people in a suburb of Pittsburgh shot and killed for no other reason, it appears, than the color of their skin or the way they worship God.

Now, you will hear all kinds of arguments about this hate crime business, but I have studied this. It is simply not true that we do not need national legislation making hate crimes against people because of race or because of sexual orientation or because of disability or because of religion a federal crime. We do.

And I have looked into the eyes of the brother and the sister of that Filipino postal worker that was gunned down in California. I have seen one of those little Jewish children that was wounded and his family at that community center in Los Angeles. I have talked to the widow of the African American former basketball coach at Northwestern who was shot walking in his neighborhood. I have put my arms around the parents of Matthew Shepard who was stretched out on a rack in Wyoming because he was gay. And I have seen the brother and sister of James Byrd who was dragged to death in Texas because he was black.

Now, if we want to be one America and we don't want any politics in it, the easiest way that we can do that is to join hands and unanimously say we can argue about a lot of things, but one thing we're never going to argue about again is our common humanity. Here is this hate crimes bill. It is who we are, it is what we stand for, it is what we believe.

You know, we do have a lot of bridges to cross. As long as there are people without economic opportunity and we can give it to them, we ought to do it. As long as there are people who don't have access to world-class education and we can give it to them, we ought to do it. As long as there are working families who can't take care of their children, we ought to do it. As long as there -- we ought to give them child care support, and access to health care they can afford. We ought to do these things.

There are so many challenges out there, but the main thing I want to tell you is this: If the good Lord came to me tonight when I walked out of this room and said, "Mr. President, now I'm not going to let you serve the end of your term, I'm taking you home tonight, and I'm no genie, I'm not going to give you three wishes, but I will give you one -- what do you want?" I would wish for our country to be truly one America.

I would wish for us to be able -- (applause) -- you know, I have -- you may have heard me tell this story on television, but I'm going to tell it one more time. I have got, on a table in the Oval Office -- when you see me there with a world leader, and you see two chairs, and two big couches and a table there -- right on that table, you look next time -- standing on that table, in a vacuum-packed glass container is a rock that Neil Armstrong took off the moon in 1969. That rock is 3.6 billion years old.

And when people come in to see me, and they get all riled up, and they get all mad at each other, and they're thinking about little things, and they're all torn up and upset -- ever since I've got that, I say, "Wait a minute, look at that rock. You see that rock? That is 3.6 billion years old. Now chill out -- we're all just passing through here."

And I say that to remind you that, whether you're President of the United States or somebody serving us this dinner tonight, the most important things about us are not the differences between me and the people serving you dinner, but the things we have in common.

And when life is all said and done, the stories we really will be thinking about in our last moments were who liked us and who loved us and what moved us, and the springtimes we remember, and the moments of personal drama and courage and meaning that came into our lives. The purpose of public life, the purpose of citizenship, the purpose of the NAACP is to give people a sense of our common humanity and our common cause. You know, Wendell said that I learned that from my grandparents, and that's true. But I learn it every day. From all the stories of all the people I see.

You have given me a memory tonight I will never forget. Your support has meant more to me than I can ever say. The people of Detroit and the state of Michigan have been with me through thick and thin. But the only thing that really matters now -- (applause) -- the only thing that really matters now is, what are you going to do tomorrow. What do you propose to do with this magic moment.

Let me tell you this: The last time we had an economy this good was in the 1960s. We broke the record of the 1960s for economic expansions. There are a lot of young children here who weren't alive back then, but I was. And I graduated from high school in 1964 in the middle of that great economic expansion -- low unemployment, low inflation, high growth, everything booming. We thought the civil rights problems would be handled in Congress and the courts. We never dreamed we'd be caught up in Vietnam. We thought we would win the Cold War, no sweat. We thought we were on automatic, marching into the future. And what happened? What happened?

Within four years, when I graduated from college, it was two days after Senator Kennedy was killed; two months after Martin Luther King was killed; nine weeks after President Johnson, the great civil rights President, couldn't even run for reelection because the country was so divided over Vietnam. And within a few months, the longest economic expansion in history was, itself, history.

Life is fleeting. Things change. I have been waiting for 35 years -- not as President, as an American citizen -- for my country to be in the position you're in tonight, to build the future of our dreams for our children. That should be the mission of the NAACP in this millennial year.

Thank you and God bless you all.

END

7:40 P.M. EDT

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Public Papers of the Presidents

November 9, 1999

CITE: 35 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 2312**LENGTH:** 4873 words**HEADLINE:** Remarks to a Democratic National Committee **Hispanic** Leadership Forum Dinner**BODY:**

Thank you very much. After that introduction, I am thinking many things. [Laughter] I'm thinking, I wonder how long it will be before Miguel will run for office. [Laughter] I'm thinking, it is much better to have such a friend than an opponent. [Laughter] Thank you. Thank you for being my friend in ways that are personal as well as political. You may, however, have caused me quite a problem tonight, not over Vieques but over saying I have a Hispanic soul. Not very long ago the great African-American Nobel Prize winning author, Toni Morrison, said I was the first black President. [Laughter] And if I am the first black President and the first President to have a Hispanic soul, I'm afraid they'll never let me go home to Ireland. [Laughter] It might be worth it. [Laughter]

Loretta Sanchez, thank you very much for your leadership and standing up here tonight and performing in your usual, laid back, repressed fashion. [Laughter] What a joy it is to have somebody like you in Congress who's not ashamed to have a good time being in public life. We ought to all enjoy it and be honored.

You know, when I see people trudging around here all the time, complaining about how hard public life is and all the burdens, I say, "You know, they're not giving these jobs away. Nobody made you come up here." [Laughter] People come to me all the time and say, "Hasn't this been just awful for you?" I say, no. [Laughter] It's actually been quite wonderful. You know, a few turns in the road one way or the other and I could be home doing deeds, wills, and divorces. [Laughter] I am grateful to be here, and I like it, every day of it. And Loretta likes it, and she's grateful to be here, and I appreciate that.

I want to thank the administration members who are here: Secretary Slater, who represented me at home today in Arkansas at the funeral of Daisy Bates, a great hero of the civil rights movement; Administrator Alvarez; Maria Echaveste; my former Secretary of Transportation and Energy, Federico Pena, who did a superb job in both places, it's nice to see you. I would also like to thank another former member of my administration who is here tonight, who is now working for Vice President Gore, Janet Murguia. Her brother was just confirmed as the first Hispanic Federal judge from Kansas, so we've got one of them on the payroll, anyway.

I want to thank all the people at my table and other places who had so much to do with the success of this evening, Joe and Alfie and Roger and Leo and all the others. Nelson, thank you very much for your leadership. Thank you, Joe Andrew and the others who are here from the DNC. Lottie Shackelford, Lydia Camarillo, thank you for your willingness to go run our convention. Make sure we all have a good time out there, will you? [Laughter]

And let me say one serious word before I go forward. There's one person I really wish were here tonight, who died a couple of days ago, the great mayor of Sacramento, California, Mayor Joe Serna. Mickey Ibarra would be here, but he's out there representing me at that service today. So I ask you all to remember Isabel Serna and the family in your prayers. They've been through a lot. He was a magnificent mayor and a great Democrat and a great friend of mine. He was one of those people who enjoyed public service, had a good time doing it, and was proud down to the last day -- his health would no longer permit him to serve -- and I ask you to remember.

I also would like to thank two people who aren't here tonight: one, Secretary Richardson, who is still in the administration; and the other whom I wish were here, Henry Cisneros, who has served us so ably and is such a great man. I thank him.

Now, as all of you know, we're trying to finish this year's budget, and we're trying to do a few other things before the Congress goes home. And I'd like to mention just a few of them because I think they relate particularly to the concerns of the Hispanic community. I want you to know what's still out there. We're fighting to get a reaffirmation of the commitment that Congress made last year, right before the election, that the majority, the Republican majority has voted to go back on. But I am determined that we will reinstate it, and that is to put 100,000 teachers out there in the early grades so we can lower class size and give our children a better education.

We are fighting to give our hardest pressed communities that still have a high crime rate 50,000 police officers on the street. We are fighting to raise the minimum wage, which I think is very, very important, especially for lower income workers, many of whom are Hispanic. You know, we lifted over 1 1/2 million Hispanics out of poverty by doubling the earned-income tax credit in 1993 and then by raising the minimum wage. And it's time to raise it again. And I hope we can prevail, and I hope you will help us.

We're trying to pass hate crimes legislation. We're trying to pass legislation that will enable disabled people to go into the work force and not lose their Medicaid health insurance. We're trying to pass the Caribbean Basin initiative and the African trade bill, which would open our markets to the Caribbean nations and African nations and open their markets more to us and put our Caribbean neighbors on a more equal footing with our Mexican neighbors in our trading relations.

All of those things can still be done before the Congress goes home. And insofar as any of you have influence with anyone, I hope you will get out there and help us with our agenda, because all these things reflect the deepest values of the Democratic Party and our commitment to the future.

I just want to make a couple of other points. I don't want to keep you late, and most of you have heard me give a lot of speeches. I had a very emotional day today. I was thinking about many things. I'm about to leave to go to Europe. Hillary and Chelsea just left to go to the Middle East to continue the work that I was doing last week in our hope that we can, over the next 100 days, actually get a framework for a final peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Then I'm going to Turkey and to Greece, two great friends of America, in the hope I can help them resolve some of their difficulties over Cyprus and other issues before I leave office. And then I'm going on to Bulgaria, a great ally of ours, to try to keep pushing to make peace in the Balkans, where we have had to take up arms in Bosnia and Kosovo to stop ethnic cleansing and slaughter.

And today I had this incredible experience, which would have been wonderful for any President but was especially wonderful for me. I hosted in the White House about 30 members of the United States Congress, Republicans and Democrats, and a couple of hundred other people to give the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award Congress can award, to the nine students who integrated Little Rock Central High School 42 years ago.

For those of you who are old enough to remember that or young enough to have studied it, you may know also that, in addition to the courage of the young children and the power of the Supreme Court's decisions and the court orders, the power of the Presidency was necessary for the integration of Little Rock Central High School when President Eisenhower sent in the 101st Airborne Division and

later federalized the Arkansas National Guard to stop the obstruction.

Today I signed a bill naming the Old Executive Office Building after President Eisenhower because he worked there many years in the military. That building, until the Great Depression, housed all the offices of the executive branch, including all the offices of what was then called the War Department, except for the Treasury Building and the Office of the President. So Dwight Eisenhower actually worked in that building as long as he worked in the White House as President.

And his son, Gen. John Eisenhower, who is also a noted historian, and John's wife and their daughter were there, so I asked them to come. So Dwight Eisenhower's son and granddaughter were actually present as we recognized these nine students. And because Arkansas is my home, I have lived with the reality of these people all my life, since I was 11 years old.

And I said today that these nine students, in their simple desire to get a better education became, as children, our teachers. When I lived at home, literally 99 percent of all children in my State went to segregated schools. And we may have had an opinion one way or the other, but everybody more or less accepted it was the way it was.

But when they did what they did, then all of a sudden, they came crashing in our lives and everyone had to decide: Where do you stand; what do you believe; how will we live? Thirty years later, I hosted them in the Governor's Mansion for the 30th anniversary of Little Rock Central High. I brought them all in, and I showed them all the rooms where the then-Governor planned the obstruction to keep them out the school. They got a big kick out of that.

And 40 years later, 2 years ago, I went home to Little Rock, to the steps of Little Rock Central High School -- which in the 1920's was voted the most beautiful school building in America, and it's still a magnificent structure -- and I held the doors open for them, with our Governor, as they walked freely through the front door, something they had not been able to do 40 years ago. And then 2 years later, they came to the White House, with all their myriad family, kinfolks, and friends, for a celebration that truly represented America at its best.

This has been a great day, a great day to be President and a great day to be an American. And to end it with you -- you and all those you represent have been so good to me and to Hillary and to the Vice President and Mrs. Gore -- is a great privilege.

I just want to leave you with a couple of thoughts. Number one, many of you helped me in 1992 because you knew we didn't want to keep on going the way we were going, because we had economic problems and social discord and political drift, and Government was discredited. So you knew what you were against, and you were willing to try something else. But I was just an argument for most of you. Most of you never met me before I started running for President, and you decided to give me a chance.

So the first thing I want to say to you is it is not an argument anymore. Together, we made a good decision, and we've changed America for the better. Seven years later, when you go home tomorrow and you go back across the country and people ask you why you were there, you can say, "Well, we gave him a chance, and we tried it their way." And as has already been said, we not only have had the most diverse administration with the most diverse appointments, including the judicial appointments -- more of whom I'm trying to get up for a vote by the way -- in history, but we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, 19.8 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest crime rates in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the lowest female unemployment rate in 46 years, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years, with the smallest Federal Government in 37 years. It is not an argument anymore. It's working. It's the right direction for America.

So the second thing I want to say to you is, we've got to decide now, what are we going to do with this. Because even if I pass everything I'm trying to pass, if we get a good minimum wage bill and the 100,000 teachers and the 50,000 police and we get the anti-environmental riders off the bills and we pass the Caribbean Basin/Africa trade initiative, we do all the things I mentioned to you, there

still will be a lot for America to do.

And of all Americans, Hispanics ought to be able to think about this, our country, as we would our family. I remember one of the nicest nights we ever shared at the White House, Federico and I, was when we previewed that wonderful movie, "Mi Familia," at the White House.

In my lifetime, which is stretching on and on as the days go by, in my lifetime, this is the first chance America has had to have, on the one hand, the prosperity and confidence that we have and, on the other, to be unburdened by serious, wrenching foreign threats to our security or domestic crises. In the 1960's we had, for a brief period more or less, the best economy we'd ever had, with low unemployment, low inflation. But we had, first, the civil rights crisis to deal with and then the war in Vietnam.

Now what do you do, as a person, as a family, as a business, if things are better than they have ever been, but you can look ahead to the future and clearly see challenges and opportunities that will not be met or seized if you don't do certain things you're not doing now? What do you do? That is the great question before our people.

I can tell you -- you know, I don't know about you, but I'll just use my own life -- from the time I was a little boy, one of the -- well, when I first ran for office, let me start with that. I asked an old sage in Arkansas politics, I said -- I was running really well in this race for Governor. I said, "What do you think I ought to really remember?" He said, "Bill, just remember this: In politics, you're always most vulnerable when you think you're invulnerable."

How many times can you remember in your own life, when you broke your concentration, when you got divided, when you made a stupid mistake because you thought things were rocking along so well, nothing bad could happen? How many times has that happened to a family or to a business, where you just think things are going to roll on forever? It's never that way. Human nature is not that way. Human circumstances don't work that way. I'm telling you, this is a precious jewel we have been given, a gift we have been given as a country, to look ahead and say, "Okay, what are the big challenges? What are the big opportunities?" You ought to make your own lists. And ask yourself, in your lifetime, has there ever been an opportunity like this for America?

What are the challenges? I'll just give you a few. The number of people over 65 is going to double in 30 years. There will be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. Medicare is supposed to run out of money in 15 years. Seventy-five percent of our seniors can't afford prescription drugs but need them to stay alive and maintain their quality of life. How are we going to deal with the aging of America?

We have the largest number of children in our schools in history, the first time more people than the baby boom, and by far more diverse. Loretta was talking about that Republican newsletter from northwest Arkansas. That's really true. Northwest Arkansas is one of the fastest growing areas of America, has been for 20 years, and one of the most racially and religiously homogeneous areas in the country. And all of a sudden, boom, they have this big infusion of Hispanics. The Catholic Church there now has a Spanish mass every Sunday and has had for the last several years. And that's nothing if you're from Orange County, but if you're from northwest Arkansas, that's a huge deal. [Laughter]

We also have a big influx of people in western Arkansas from Southeast Asia. But last year, our State ranked first or second -- I'm not sure which, but I'm sure it's one of the two -- in the percentage growth of Hispanic population. Joe Andrew didn't mention this, I don't think, but in addition to all the mayors we've celebrated, we've had a truly historic, breathtaking election in the State of Mississippi, where we won the governorship in a State where they didn't think a Democrat could be elected for love or money.

And part of it was the overwhelming African-American turnout. But there are also more Hispanics moving to Mississippi. All over the South, their voices are being heard. And we only won the election by about 6,000 votes, so everybody can take credit for the victory. [Laughter]

So we have to think about this. What are we going to do for all these children? They need a world-class education. If we do it right, the diversity of America will be a blessing in a global society. What are we going to do about the fact that this fabulous recovery has left people and places behind? Unemployment on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is 73 percent. Upstate New York, outside of the suburbs in New York City, if it were a separate State, would rank 49th in job growth since I've been President. Hawaii, burdened by the collapse of the Asian economy, is the only State with no economic growth -- the inner cities, the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia.

How are we going to bring prosperity to people and places left behind? Do we have the will to guarantee economic growth for a generation of Americans by taking America out of debt? I gave a budget to the Congress that will get us out of debt over the next 15 years, for the first time since 1835. And the progressive party, the Democrats, ought to be for that. It sounds like a conservative thing -- it is -- but it's the progressive thing to do in a global economy. Because if the government is not borrowing money, you can borrow it for less, and our trading partners can get more for less, and then they can be better partners with us, and they can lift their people out of poverty.

How are we going to grow the economy and meet our environmental responsibility? We've proved you could do it. Are we going to keep doing it? We've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. Does anybody seriously think America is as safe as it ought to be? If you do, let me just give you one statistic. The accidental death rate of children from gun shots in the United States is 9 times the rate of the next 25 biggest industrial economies combined.

I think we now know we can bring the crime rate down. Why don't we set a realistic goal -- I mean, realistic in terms of our dreams. Why don't we say we won't quit until America is the safest big country in the world? And if we want that, how are we going to do it?

Last night, I appeared in the first-ever townhall meeting on the Internet, which was interesting for me, since one of the reasons I asked the Vice President to join the ticket is because I was so technologically challenged. [Laughter] It was quite a thrill for me to do that.

But there is a digital divide, and it can have huge consequences. I was in northern California the other night, meeting with people who work for eBay. Do you all ever use eBay? Buy anything on eBay? You want to hear something interesting? Over 20,000 Americans now make a living on eBay, not working for eBay, trading on eBay, many of them former welfare recipients. Think of what we could do in America to close the economic divide if we could close the digital divide, if usage and access to computers and connections to the Internet were as dense as telephone ownership and usage. Think of it. Now, these are the kind of things we ought to be thinking about.

What are the security threats of the 21st century? Well, I think one of them is we can start running away from each other because we've all of a sudden gotten afraid of trade. We need to keep expanding trade but work harder to put a human face on it, to take into account legitimate environmental issues and labor issues, but not to run away from the fact that with 4 percent of the world's people and 22 percent of the world's income if we want to continue to grow, we've got to sell something to the other 96 percent. And if we want to sell something to them, particularly since we're richer, we have to be willing to buy things. But this is a good thing.

What else? The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical, and biological, and the possibility that they can be made in smaller quantities, like everything else is smaller. We've got cell phones so small now my big old fingers won't even hit the numbers right. The miniaturization of all things technical will apply to weapons, as well, make no mistake about it. This is a serious challenge, the growth of terrorism around the world, the prospect that the terrorists, the drug runners, the organized criminals will all start working together, and the rampant threat of racial, ethnic, and religious wars -- big challenges.

Which brings me to the last one. And it's what I've spent so much time on around the world and what I celebrated today with honoring the Little Rock Nine: Can we truly make our motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, real as we grow ever more diverse?

It requires, I would argue, three things. One is, we have to respect, not just tolerate -- not just tolerate -- but respect and celebrate our differences. You know, I don't have the same attitude as the people that put out that memo Loretta talked about. I think it's a lot more interesting in America as we grow more diverse.

I'll never forget the first Cinco de Mayo celebration I went to in San Francisco. I thought, "Where has this been all my life?" [Laughter] You know? I mean, what have we been doing here?

You know, I used to -- when I was Governor of my home State, I used to go to a place called Little Italy to eat spaghetti in a town called Slovak, to meet with the farmers that came there in the 1848 revolution. And now we're just repeating our history in technicolor, times four. And I think it's fascinating.

But let's stop all this tolerance stuff. Tolerance is not good enough. We need respect and celebration of our differences, number one.

Number two, we need to recognize that, as we have from the beginning, we have genuine differences of opinion, which ought to be forthrightly and publicly argued. In that sense, and if that's all we're doing, partisanship is not necessarily a bad thing. When people say partisanship with a little negative edge, what they really mean is these people in Washington are fighting their partisan battles trying to increase their power without concern for the public interest. They think there's some game going on that's not real. But we will always have honest differences.

I know why I'm a Democrat in the year 1999. And I have friends in the Republican Party who know why they're Republicans. And we honestly see the world in different ways. We ought to create a safe and constructive way for people to feel free to think and argue.

But the third thing we have to do is to recognize that the differences we celebrate and the differences we fight over, neither one of them are nearly as important as our common humanity. And that is what the world keeps forgetting, at its peril.

Don't you think it's interesting that, at a time when we talk about the Internet -- this and finding a cure for cancer, and last year we actually were able to transplant nerves into the spine of laboratory animals that had had their spines severed, and for the first time ever they have movement in their lower limbs. Two years ago we identified the two genes that are the biggest predictors of breast cancer for women. Within a couple of years, when mothers take their babies home from the hospital, we'll be able to give them a genetic map which will say, here are the things your child has a greater than normal propensity for, but if you do the following things, you can minimize them. A lot of people I know, experts in the field, actually believe within a very few years babies will be born with a life expectancy of nearly a century -- within a very few years. Already today, if you live to be 65, your life expectancy is over 82 years.

Isn't it interesting, at this time, with all this marvelous stuff happening, not to mention all the techno-joys we can have, that the biggest problems we have in the world are rooted in the oldest failing of human society? We are afraid of people who are different from us. And when you're afraid of somebody who's different from you, it's easy to formalize that fear in dislike or hatred, and it's a short step to dehumanizing them, after which it's a short step to taking violent action against them and to thinking it really doesn't matter.

I'll never forget being in the airport at Kigali, Rwanda, talking to a woman who thought she had been killed, because she was cut up in one of the machete rampages in the Rwandan genocide, and she woke up to find her husband and her six children all slashed to death around her. She's the only surviving one, knowing that they had been betrayed by her neighbor, a person they lived with, lived next to her, in total peace for years, and boom, like that, they started the fight between the Hutus and Tutsis, and people turned on a dime, betrayed their neighbors-for-life, and let people be slaughtered.

Now there are lots of other stories that are heroic on the other side. But what happens to people? Why does that happen?

Why are the Catholics and the Protestants still fighting in Northern Ireland when the Irish Republic has got the fastest growing economy in Europe, and their common heritage is rich and fascinating and interesting, and they could be having arguments in bars or in Parliament and making money, instead, and educating their children?

What is it that's keeping the Israelis and the Palestinians from taking these last few steps, the Syrians from joining in? Why are there other terrorist and rejectionist groups that are prepared to go out and kill innocent civilians to keep the Israelis and the Palestinians and the Syrians from making their final peace agreement?

If you look at America, you look at the success of people from the Indian subcontinent in America -- from India, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh -- the phenomenal success, if you look at the fact that India will be bigger than China in 20 years, that they both have big scientific bases of expertise, why are they fighting over the line of control in Kashmir? Why can't they work that out? Why is that such a big problem that they keep spending money preparing to go to war with one another instead of educating their children and alleviating the abject poverty that is holding them down and keeping them from their full potential? I mean, I could go on and on and on. But you get the point.

Why did I have to go into Europe and bring the power of the American military to bear in Bosnia and Kosovo to keep people from slaughtering mostly Muslims, although others were involved too. What is the deal here? Same reason, in a more -- thank God -- mundane but still very cruel way people were spitting on and kicking and cursing those nine kids when they tried to go to Little Rock Central High School 42 years ago.

One of the great human weaknesses is that when people get organized, they think that, in order for their tribe to matter, the other tribe has to matter less. In order for their lifestyle to be validated, somebody else's has to be invalidated, that every difference of opinion turns out to be a difference justifying the dehumanization of your opponent. This is a very dangerous thing, made more dangerous, not less, by the collision of societies and the close contact and the openness of borders.

So we need you for another reason. We need you in the Democratic Party. We need you as Americans. We need you to remind us of what the concept of family means to you. What are the obligations of people who are in your family? What do we owe to one another? If you're like me, once you get about 50, your family members, there are some you don't even like very much. But you are bound together. You are bound together.

I want you to think about that, so when you go out across the country, you go back home and people say, "Why are you here? What are you doing? Why are you a Democrat? Why are you helping who you're helping in 2000?" Say, "Well, number one, I tried him in '92 and it worked. We're in a lot better shape than we were then, and we're in a lot better shape than we've been in a long time. Number two, I'm doing it because I want to take on the big challenges of the future. And I'm really determined that we're not going to blow this responsibility to our children and grandchildren. And number three, because the Democrats represent the best hope for creating a family in America and a family in the world that doesn't minimize our differences; it celebrates them. It doesn't minimize our arguments; it respects them. But it recognizes that underneath it all is our common humanity. And without that, nothing else matters much. With it, there's nothing we can't do."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the St. Regis Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Miguel Lausell, chair, Hispanic Leadership Council; Representative Loretta Sanchez, general cochair, Democratic National Committee; and President Eisenhower's daughter-in-law Joanne and her daughter, Susan.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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↓
how far we've come...

today 2 or 3 -

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MOSAIC: How could you define "American"?

Tan: Well, I think it's an interesting question, especially now that the demographics are changing and people are wanting to close borders. What do we mean by American culture? And I think we're lacking a good consensus on what we mean by that, what keeps us together, what makes us proud. **I would say it's that right or that ability that - - we would like to claim - - allows us to create the life that we wish, that we can become who we want to be. We have the right to shape our identity, which is not true of a lot of other countries. And within that right there's this freedom of expression, freedom of the pursuit of happiness. Not that the opportunities are always available to do that - as when we look at people who are stuck in lives full of despair - but that potential exists and that's what I think is America.**

Finally, what does the American Dream mean to you?

It took me a long time to understand what the American Dream was. I always thought it was that things get better and better. You have every right to have things get better and better, and equal opportunity and all of that. My parents took it literally. We moved from 41st to 51st to 61st Street and Highland Avenue in Oakland. I mean, we were going higher and higher up in the world.

I realize now that the most important thing that is an American Dream -- in looking at people living in other countries, in looking at the life my sisters had not growing up in this country -- is...

...the American freedom to create your own identity. I think that's uniquely American. In no other country do you have that opportunity.

It's not to say that everything will happen fairly and the way that you want. But I think that this is a country where that opportunity -- to be as wild as you want, as generous as you want, as crazy as you want, as artistic as you want, that all of that, the whole range -- exists. And we have a Constitution, a tradition, a culture that supports that. I hope it continues to support that. I hope it especially continues to support the arts in that direction. It is that self-determination of your identity, to define what it means to be an American, and that nobody defines that for you.

-- how you deal with your successes, your failures, with love, with loss.

So apart from all those very tangible, discrete goals, I think it's nice to start off with the framework of what that philosophy might encompass. Nobody can tell you what it is. It's uniquely your own and you put the things in the basket that you want: the questions you want, the things that are important, the values, the ideas, the emotions. You look at it from time to time and see if it's staying the same or if it's changing. It's a wonderful way to observe life, because so much of life is not simply getting from step to step, but it's the things you discover about yourself and others around you and your relationships.

It's fascinating and that makes every life worth living. It makes you see in everybody you meet, no matter how much you respect or disrespect them, that their life is uniquely theirs and deserves some consideration too. It makes life fascinating and a wonder.

If you had to choose one or two books to read to your grandchildren, what might they be? You can choose as many as you wish.

How old are these grandkids? This sounds like a very selfish thing, a very egocentric thing. I would probably read them a book that I've written. If they were young, I would read them *The Moon Lady* or *The Chinese Siamese Cat*. If they were older, I would read them *The Joy Luck Club* or *The Kitchen God's Wife* or *The Hundred Secret Senses*, because the things I would want to say to my grandchildren, if I had them, are the things that I wanted to say to myself when I was younger, exactly those things. It's not out of pride that these are better stories or words. These are the things that are important to me and my family. My books and my stories are about families, so why wouldn't I tell them the things that I thought were important to our family, that are in my books?



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Amy, please count me among your admirers. That was wonderful.

Thank you.

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