

Remarks at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute 46th Annual Awards Gala
September 21, 2023

Hello, hello, hello. Whoa. My Lord, this dinner gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Thanks for inviting me. Please, have a seat if you have one. If you don't, come on up with me.

Adriano, thanks for that introduction. And thank you, too, to Nanette and the 42 members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, a record number.

Thanks also to the members of my Cabinet who are here tonight, the most diverse Cabinet in American history, including Secretary Becerra—Mr. Secretary; Secretary Cardona; Secretary Mayorkas; Small Business Administrator Isabel Guzman, an alum of this institution.

I'm proud to have so many other alumni of this institution serving all across our administration. We have Alma Acosta, executive director of the caucus for 5 years. She's a member of my White House team. And I especially want to thank a great leader, Tom Perez, my Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Congratulations to tonight's awardees, includes Sister Norma. Sister, I don't know where you are, but bless me, Father, but I have not sinned so far tonight. [*Laughter*] I want you to know. Look, you're known as the "Mother Teresa of Texas." And, Sister—I know Sister Norma lives the lessons she—the nuns taught me growing up, lessons based on the Gospel of Matthew: to feed the hungry, care for the sick, to welcome strangers.

They echo what my dad taught me—and I mean this sincerely. My dad used to say "Everyone—everyone—is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect." The Congressional Black [Hispanic; White House correction] Caucus embodies those values.

Just think of the work we've done together on civil rights, labor rights, health care, education, and, folks, to fundamentally change the direction of our economy, to grow it from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top down. Folks, the press started calling it—the Wall Street Journal and others started calling it "Bidenomics," as if it was a bad thing. Well, I think it's a pretty damn good thing; it's working. It's working.

We created 13.5 million jobs, and about 4 million of those jobs are Latinos. Eight hundred thousand manufacturing jobs. Unemployment under 4 percent for the longest stretch in half a century, and Latino unemployment at record lows. And now, we have the lowest inflation and the fastest recovery and the strongest economy of any major economy in the world.

Folks, with the help of many of you, as was mentioned earlier, we passed the American Rescue Plan, cutting child poverty in half among Latinos to the lowest level on record. On record. And now we need Congress to expand that child tax credit and make it permanent. Make it permanent.

We also helped more Latinos gain health insurance than ever before and expanded access to health services in Spanish.

We passed the bipartisan infrastructure law to rebuild our roads, our bridges, our ports, our airports; provide high-speed internet for every American household; and replace every lead pipe in America so every child when they turn on the faucet can drink clean water and there's no brain damage.

We've already announced 37,000 projects nationwide investing in the future of Latino communities. We've made Puerto Rico's economic recovery and development a priority with funding for infrastructure, clean energy, and transportation updates.

Meanwhile, with your help, the Inflation Reduction Act is reducing the cost of prescription drugs for Latino families. We finally beat Big Pharma. I've been fighting it since I've been a—since I was a freshman. Finally.

So Medicare—Medicare—can negotiate for lower drug prices. Insulin for seniors is now \$35, instead of 400 bucks a month. Seniors' out-of-pocket drug costs will be capped at \$2,000 a year for all their medication, including those who need very badly cancer drugs that can cost anywhere from \$12- to \$14,000.

With your help, we're making the biggest climate investment ever in the history of the world: \$369 billion. We're helping those fenceline communities—the ones that got caught in all of this—bringing environmental jobs [environmental justice and jobs; White House correction] to frontline and fenceline communities suffering from a legacy of pollution.

My budget secured a 30-percent increase in Federal childcare funding and an additional \$1 billion for Head Start, where one in three beneficiaries are Latinos.

Folks, a record \$15 billion for Hispanic-serving colleges and universities, including \$40 million in a—new grants we announced today. I'm keeping my commitment to do what I can to ease the burden of student debt, which fall heaviest on Black and Latino borrowers. On my watch, more than \$117 billion in student loans have been canceled. Canceled. And our new SAVE program will cut in half what the average Latino borrower has remaining to pay.

I want to thank the Caucus—the Hispanic Caucus for your leadership on this issue.

At the same time, we're investing in Latino small businesses. And with your help, we've awarded small disadvantaged businesses a record \$70 billion in Federal contracts.

You all—there's a law that's been around a long time no one talks about. In the mid-thirties, we passed a law that said that we should—when you—when the Congress appropriates money and the President has to spend it, he should spend in using American workers and using American product. No one paid much attention to that. But I have. Under my administration, Latino entrepreneurs are starting new businesses at the fastest rate in over a decade, faster than any group in America.

And we're doing all this while reducing the deficit. I love our friends on the right talk about—the MAGA guys—about reducing the deficit. Give me a break. *[Laughter]*

On my watch, deficit has already fallen over \$1 trillion. And I signed legislation to reduce the deficit by another trillion dollars the next decade. The last guy had a \$400 billion—billion-dollar—deficit over 4 years. We're doing it by making the wealthy and big corporations begin to start to pay their fair share.

Anybody out here think the tax system is fair? Raise your hand. Well, we have about a thousand billionaires in America. You know what the average rate the—how much—the average rate that they pay for Federal taxes? Eight percent in Federal income taxes. Eight. That's less than a firefighter or a teacher.

It's wrong. And I'm promising a billion—I'm proposing a billionaire minimum tax. And I'm keeping my commitment: I won't raise Federal tax on anybody making less than 400 grand a year.

But let me—you—I want you to know this: We can do a lot more. In the wake of the historic shooting in Uvalde, Jill and I visited and spent hours with—I met with every family member.

We signed the most significant gun safety law you all passed in nearly 30 years. And now—now—we have to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. I did it once as a Senator. We'll do it again.

We also have to codify *Roe v. Wade* and defend—[applause]—and defend the sacred right to vote.

And we have to finally fix the broken immigration system, for God's sake.

First piece of legislation I introduced—on my first day in office, I sent an immigration reform bill to the Congress, one that recognizes immigrants' contributions to this country and provides a pathway to citizenship for "Dreamers," temporary status holders, farmworkers, and others.

We need our colleagues to act. For decades, immigration reform had been a bipartisan [issue; White House correction] in this country. Unfortunately, the MAGA Republicans in Congress and my predecessor spent 4 years gutting the immigration system—under my predecessor. They continue to undermine our border security today, blocking bipartisan reform.

So, until Congress acts, I'm going keep using every tool at my disposal as President of the United States to preserve and protect DACA, keep fighting for Dreamers, and build a safe, orderly, humane immigration system. [Applause] I mean it.

First, we've put in place policies that process people in a fair and fast way. Second, we're significantly expanding legal pathways for entry so businesses can get the workers they need, families don't have to wait for a decade to be together.

I've also directed my team to make a historic increase in the number of refugees admitted from Latin America, people fleeing violence and persecution who simply want their kids to have a better life. Next week, my team will consult with Congress on this plan.

Third, we're supporting States and cities that have seen a surge in immigrants. We've developed Federal experts and deployed them to help train city workers. We've launched outreach campaigns, helping over a million eligible migrants apply for work permits. And we're accelerating a process for work permit applications.

Right now most migrants have to wait 6 months after filing their claim before they can go to work. Only Congress can change that. But the Secretary of Homeland Security can take extraordinary action. And yesterday, given the poor conditions in Venezuela, Secretary Mayorkas announced temporary protection for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans already in this country.

These migrants will be able to apply for a work permit. But that's not all. We've already delivered over \$1 billion that Congress appropriated to States and cities receiving immigrants—migrants.

I've requested more funding. But instead of stepping up with solutions, Republicans are threatening to shut down the Government. Now, I want you to think about this, man. Think how many people it's going to hurt. Think of the people who are going to get hurt. It's time to act.

Meanwhile, we appreciate what businesses and nonprofits and churches and everyday Americans are doing with inspirational leaders like Sister Norma—are doing to keep those in need what they need to just stay alive.

You know, my dad used to have an expression. He'd also say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.'"

Well, guess what? We're going to ask them to join us in doing a hell of a lot more.

Folks, let me close with this. We're the only country in the world not built on ethnicity, geography, religion. We're the only country in the world built on an idea. And that's no—that's not hyperbole. America is built on an idea. Almost every other country in the world is built on ethnicity or religion.

The idea is simple, and it sounds profound, but it's real. The idea is we're all created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives. We have never fully lived up to that. But we've never attempted to walk away from it either like our MAGA friends have. We're not going to walk away from it now. And I believe we're a hopeful and optimistic nation that draws our strength from our diversity. I really believe it: Our diversity is our primary strength.

That's why I keep fighting for a dedicated museum on the National Mall to celebrate the significance and contributions of Latino community—[*applause*]. Not a joke. It's consequential.

That's why at the time when there are those who want to ban books, erase parts of our history, we're going to make it clear, as we have here tonight, during Hispanic Heritage Month: The Hispanic heritage in America is American heritage. That's what it is.

No, think about it, folks. I'm not trying to just be nice. Let's be simple about this. Twenty six of every one hundred children in grade school from kindergarten through high school come from Spanish-speaking homes. Twenty-six. Folks, what are we doing if we don't respond? This is our future. You're our future.

The idea of America lives in all of us. The idea lives in the dreams of those who've only just arrived, in the legacy of families who've been here for generations.

I want you all to know: I see you. I hear you. We need you. The American people are the heroes of this story.

You never give up. And we always dream. We always believe. And that's why I can honestly say I've never been more optimistic in my entire career. We just have to remember who in God's name we are. We are the United States of America.

There is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we work together. Nothing. Think about it. There's not one goal we've ever set as a community we haven't achieved. So let's get the hell on with the job we have at hand.

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:02 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Adriano D. Espaillat, in his capacity as deputy chair, and Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán, in her capacity as chair, of the Hispanic Congressional Caucus; Special Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs Alma Acosta; Norma Pimentel, executive director, Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley; and former President Donald J. Trump. This transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 22.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute 46th annual awards gala.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Acosta, Alma; Barragán, Nanette Diaz; Becerra, Xavier; Biden, Jill T.; Cardona, Miguel A.; Espaillat, Adriano D.; Guzman, Isabel Casillas; Mayorkas, Alejandro N.; Perez, Thomas J.; Pimentel, Norma; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Broadband and wireless technologies; Childcare facilities, government assistance; Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute; Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy; Early childhood education and literacy; Environmental justice; Federal deficit and debt; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Health insurance, access and availability; Immigration reform; Inflation; Infrastructure improvements; Job creation and growth; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Poverty reduction efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Puerto Rico, economic growth and development; Refugees and migrants, U.S. admission policy; Reproductive health care; Secretary of Education; Secretary of Health and Human Services; Secretary of Homeland Security; Small Business Administration; Small businesses, promotion efforts; Special Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs; Tax Code reform; Texas, 2022 shooting in Uvalde; Unemployment rate; Venezuela, political unrest and economic instability; Voting rights, protection efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300823.