

## Teleconference Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the National Council of La Raza *July 19, 1995*

*The President.* Thank you, Irma Flores-Gonzalez, for that warm introduction, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your warm welcome.

I'm glad to see so many of my friends out there, and I want to say a special hello to your president, Raul Yzaguirre, and Irma's predecessor, Dr. Audrey Alvarado. The First Lady sends her regrets at not being able to be with you today. I hope you won't be too disappointed that I'm going to be her stand-in. I'm also sorry I can't be with you in person, as I was last year in Miami.

Just a little over an hour ago, at the National Archives here in Washington, I announced the results of our administration's review of Federal affirmative action programs and my convictions about what we ought to do with affirmative action. I made it clear that an essential part of our search for common ground in the exercise of our freedom is an unwavering commitment to genuine equal opportunity for all Americans. Affirmative action is simply a tool in the pursuit of that enduring national interest, equal opportunity.

Hispanics are making huge strides in ways we cannot have even imagined just a generation ago. I don't want any Hispanic child in America to feel that his or her race is an impediment to full achievement. Every child has a right to the American dream, and all of us have a responsibility to nourish that dream.

But until this country has achieved equality of opportunity, until we have stamped out discrimination, we will still need the remedy of affirmative action. It must be done the right way: It must be flexible, it must be fair, and it must work. Let me be clear: Our administration is against quotas, we're against guaranteed results, but we do need to guarantee genuine equality of opportunity for all Americans.

We want to support the programs that are working, and we want to get rid of the ones that aren't. If you ask me in a sentence what we need to do, I'd say we need to mend but not to end affirmative action. We ought to stay with our principles and fix whatever practices we need to fix.

Our study showed that, indeed, affirmative action has been an effective tool in expanding opportunity for those who have suffered discrimination in the Army, in education, in small business loans, in employment by Federal contractors, in the set-aside programs. We have seen again and again that when affirmative action is done in the right way, it has helped more minorities and women to pursue the American dream, people like Paul Gutierrez in Omaha, who owns Midwest Maintenance; Ernest Gonzalez of West Babylon, New York, who owns a chemical distribution company; Santos Garza of Bethesda, Maryland, who owns a security company.

After 25 years of experience, we know that these programs can work, but we also know that there have been some problems with them. So it is time to take a good look at what's working and what isn't. That's why I announced the series of steps that we'll take to change and to improve our approach to affirmative action. First, we want to crack down on those who take advantage of other people who deserve the program through their own fraud and abuse. We'll still offer new businesses a leg up, but we're going to make sure the set-asides go to the businesses that need them most.

Second, we're going to comply with the Supreme Court's decision in the *Adarand* case last month. That means focusing set-asides to regions and business sectors where the serious problems of discrimination are clear and provable. I have directed the Attorney General and the agencies to move forward with this expeditiously. The *Adarand* decision did require us to improve the way in which we do affirmative action, but I want all of you to understand, it did not dismantle set-asides. In fact, a huge majority of the Supreme Court, seven of the nine Justices, reaffirmed the need for good affirmative action because of the continuing evidence of discrimination in our national life.

The stricter standards of *Adarand* have been met by State and local governments who were ordered several years ago to adhere to these standards. And the best State and local set-

asides that have been challenged have met the standards and survived the challenge.

The third thing we need to do is to help disadvantaged people and distressed communities wherever they are and regardless of their race or gender. That's what we tried to do in the empowerment zone program. And that's why I've asked Vice President Gore to develop a proposal to use our contracting in the Government to support businesses that locate themselves in truly distressed areas or that hire many of their workers from these areas.

The truth is that there are whole pockets of America that have been left behind in the free enterprise system. And we need to give people incentives to invest in those areas and those people, not as a substitute for affirmative action but as a supplement to it. We need to do this. Most of these areas will be disproportionately minority, but not all of them will be. I am convinced we have got to focus on getting people who are in these isolated areas, whether they're in rural or urban areas, the benefits of the American dream. We cannot grow the American economy in the 21st century if we continue to have pockets of abject poverty where people are dying to go to work.

I have also directed all our agencies to apply four standards of fairness to all our affirmative action programs: first, no quotas or any inflexible numerical straitjackets in theory or in practice; second, no illegal discrimination of any kind, including reverse discrimination; third, no preferential treatment for people who are not qualified; and finally, when a program has met its goal it must be retired. Any program that doesn't meet these four principles must be eliminated or reformed.

Affirmative action has been good for America. That doesn't mean it's always been perfect. It doesn't mean it should go on forever. It should be retired when its job is done, and I am resolved that that day will come. But you and I know that job is not done yet, and we do not need to abandon affirmative action.

It is my firm belief that our diversity can be America's greatest strength in the 21st century. We're going into an information age. We have to be prepared to compete and win in the global economy, with all of its different cultures. And we are so well positioned in this country, with well over 150 different racial and ethnic groups, with opening opportunities to women as well as men. But we have to say

to ourselves honestly, we are not where we need to be. And we're going to need everyone pulling together if our country is going to move into the 21st century in good shape. So we can't back away from our commitment to expand equal opportunity and to require responsibility from every single American.

You know, I ran for President to do two things: first, to restore the American dream of opportunity and the American value of responsibility and, second, to bring the American people together again, so that we could move into the next century together. I have learned in the past 2½ years that we can't do one without the other. We can't solve our economic problems or our social problems unless we do them together and unless we come together. We all have to bring the American people together.

That's really the bottom line of this debate about affirmative action. You and I and all Americans have to sit down and find a way to bridge the great divides in our society. We have to find a way to honor our diversity in the context of our shared values, our shared interests, and our shared commitments to both equal opportunity and to high standards of qualification and performance. If we do this, we'll be stronger; we'll be better prepared as a nation to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

By the year 2010, Latinos will be the largest minority group in our country. Your voices and your talents are absolutely critical to lead us into the new century. You're already doing that in many ways, in daily life and in public service.

We should all be grateful for the work that all of you do, but I want to mention one of your number in particular, New Mexico Congressman Bill Richardson. He did a great job in Haiti. He did a great job in North Korea. And I know how proud all of you are—and I can hear by your applause—at the work he did, the brilliant work he did to help to bring home the two Americans who were wrongfully imprisoned in Iraq. He is a great American, and every American should be grateful to him for what he did.

Just last week at the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Dinner, Vice President Gore announced my intention to honor another great American, Willie Velasquez, with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. I am honored to honor the memory of a man who gave all of us so much. For too long, Latinos were deprived of the chance to serve in the highest levels

of government. This was a loss for your community and a loss for our Nation. We are a rich country but not so rich that we can afford to waste the talents of so many of our best people. Willie Velasquez knew this. His memory and legacy are alive in every corner of our administration.

And as we continue to move forward together, you know that we have more to do. But there are already more than 2 times as many Hispanic appointees in our administration than in the previous two administrations. In addition, to Henry Cisneros at HUD and Federico Pena at the Department of Transportation, there are so many others who are contributing to our country and our future.

Let me just make one other point in closing, and then I know you have a question or two. You have to help us as a country make sure that this affirmative action program is not used as one more way to divide middle class and working poor Americans.

The real problem that is driving this new debate on affirmative action is a problem you know well. The ground is moving under America. Look at the last 2½ years. I have instituted a new economic strategy that has helped to bring us 7 million jobs. We have an enormous increase in the number of new businesses, the highest on record. We have more new millionaires than ever before. The stock market is at an all time high. Corporate profits are high. But you know what? More than half the American people are working harder today for the same or lower wages they were making 2½ years ago. More than half of our people still feel insecure about their jobs, their health care, their retirements, their ability to educate their children. Now, these are things that we have to face.

I know Secretary Dick Riley has already talked with you about the need to strengthen our commitment to education. But before I go on that, I want you to focus on this. A lot of this heat on affirmative action is being generated by people who want to blame minorities, who want to blame women's groups, and who want to blame the Federal Government and this administration for the economic distress of the middle class. It's been building for decades, and we have a strategy to do something about it. Affirmative action—it did not cause the economic problems of middle class America. And affirmative action alone will not solve all the

economic problems of women and racial minorities in this country.

So what we have to do is to say, let's look at affirmative action on its own merits. Let's realize we're all stronger when we grow together. But let's also recognize that we have to have a strategy to lift this country up. Don't let the people who are pursuing policies that will drive us down and drive us apart prevail by preying on the legitimate anxieties of middle class Americans to get this country moving for them again.

That all begins with a commitment, a renewed commitment to education. This issue is so important to all of us here that I just want to take one minute to echo and amplify what Secretary Riley said to you. Affirmative action without a commitment to education won't work. School is where young people learn the skills to pursue middle class dreams. It's where middle class values are taught and where parents can know that the teachers will reinforce things like responsibility and honesty and trustworthiness and hard work and caring for one another and for our natural environment, where good citizenship can be taught and where it can be modeled.

A good education has always been key to unlocking the promise of tomorrow. And today, more than ever, those without it are being left behind. That's why under our plan we can balance the budget and increase educational investment by \$40 billion in proven programs that work, from expanding Head Start to more affordable and repayable college loans.

The plan of the Republican majority in Congress will balance the budget, all right, but it cuts education by \$36 billion, right at the time when we need to be doing more to prepare our young people to take their productive places in the global economy. It does not make sense. It also doesn't make sense for them to cut funds on the fight on crime, cut our investments in safe and drug-free schools. There are a lot of things that don't make sense.

So, as we work in the coming months to balance the budget, I hope you'll help me do it in the right way. If we take a little longer and we don't give huge tax cuts to people who don't really need it, we can invest in middle class Americans and in poor Americans who were determined to work their way into the middle class.

You and I know it would be self-defeating to cut our investments in education. Cutting education today would be like cutting defense budgets at the height of the cold war. Our national security depends upon our ability to educate all of our people, to give them the tools they need to make the most of their own lives.

Our mission, yours and mine together, must be to build a bridge to the future so that every American can cross it. We have to give every Latino and every other American the power they all need to make the most of their own lives and to give their children better lives. That's what's behind my approach to affirmative action. That's what's behind my commitment to education. That's what's behind my economic strategy. I want our children's generation to inherit an America with as much new opportunity as the one into which I was brought into. If people take the kind of responsibility you have taken to make our country better and we do the right things here, we will be better.

I thank you for your service to your community. I thank you for your service to your country. I ask you to stay at it, stand up for the proposition that all of us are going forward together.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

*[A participant asked how the administration planned to address the concerns of Hispanic women in the work force.]*

*The President.* Thank you.

First of all, I'd like to talk a little bit about our survey. In our Working Women Count Campaign, conducted by Secretary Reich at the Department of Labor with the able assistance of Hermalinda Pompa of the Women's Bureau, we circulated a questionnaire to working women. Two hundred and fifty thousand Hispanic women replied. They told us they were interested in pay and benefits, in having the ability to both work and to care for their children, and in making sure that women could be valued and treated properly and fairly in the workplace.

We are determined to do what we can to advance this cause. First of all, we want to make sure Hispanic women understand the rights and opportunities to which they're entitled as working Americans. And we have translated into Spanish, for example, information on the family leave law, information on the sexual harassment laws, information on pregnancy and other em-

ployment discrimination practices. I think that is very important.

But secondly, and even more important, we have to pursue an economic agenda that will help Hispanic women. We, first of all, have to raise the minimum wage. There are 300,000 Hispanic women in this country who would make an average of more than \$1,800 a year more than they're making now and put another \$1 billion into the American economy if we raised the minimum wage. And if we don't raise the minimum wage, next year, in terms of its real buying power, the minimum wage will fall to a 40-year low.

One of the real big fights we're having up here in Washington today is the fight between my vision of a smart-work, high-wage future and the alternative vision of a high-profit but hard-work and low-wage future. I think it's clear which one is in the best interest of the American people. We ought to start with raising the minimum wage.

The second thing we need to do is to pass the "GI bill" of rights for America's workers, which includes consolidating all the various Government training programs into one big pool and then giving people who are unemployed or under-employed the right to a voucher worth \$2,600 a year for 2 years, which they can take to the local community college or anyplace else if they want to get retraining and education after they have left high school and when they're in the work force. That is a very important proposal we have made that has achieved—gotten too little attention. I think we have a chance to pass it, and we ought to do so.

The third thing that we ought to do in my opinion is to concentrate tax relief on middle income families and on childrearing and education costs. That will help Hispanic women enormously.

The fourth thing we need to do is to pass the welfare reform bill that has been proposed in the United States Senate by Senator Barbara Mikulski, Senator Daschle, and Senator Breaux, which focuses on giving people who are on welfare the child care they need so that they can be able to go to work, they can be required to work, and we can end welfare as we know it by helping people be good parents.

So these are just some of the things that I think we ought to do, and I hope you'll help me implement it. We have to win this budget fight. All this is going to play out in the context

of the budget fight. Our budget fight is good for growing Americans. It's good for children. It's good for middle class people. It's good for people who want to work their way out of poverty. And we have to win it.

*[A participant explained that he was satisfied with the President's commitment to affirmative action but was concerned that there were not enough Hispanic-Americans in the administration. He then asked how the President planned to become more actively involved with the Hispanic-American community.]*

*The President.* Well, first of all, let's deal with the facts as they exist. Our administration has appointed more Hispanics than any administration in history, more than twice as many as either of the previous two, and several hundred. We also have major domestic policy considerations in the hands of Secretary Cisneros and Secretary Pena.

I've also had the privilege, as you know, to have the regular counsel of the head of the EEOC, Gil Casellas; Norma Cantu at the Department of Education; Maria Echaveste at the Department of Labor; Nelson Diaz at HUD; George Munoz at Treasury, Aida Alvarez at HUD, Fernando Torres-Gil at HHS, Katherine Archuleta at Transportation and Joaq Otero at Labor, among others.

And at the White House, as you know, we have lost some people, but we still have an awful lot of talented Latinos on our staff. In fact, one of them made history this afternoon. Carolyn Curiel personally helped me craft my affirmative action speech. She had more to do with drafting it than anybody else. And she is the first person of color and, more importantly, the first Latino in the history of our country to write speeches for the President. And it may be that the one she wrote today will go down as one of the two or three most important I have ever delivered. In the White House, as you know, she's joined by Rick Hernandez, Janet Maguida, Ray Martinez, Liz Montoya, Suzanne Ramos, Suzanna Valdez, Vicki Rivas-Vazquez, Araceli Ruano, and others.

Now, I want to answer your two questions here. Number one, I am always looking for more good people for important appointments to boards and commissions and other things. But I want to point out again, if you look at my record on judges, I have appointed more than 3 times as many Hispanic judges in the

first 2 years of my Presidency as Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Carter combined did in the first 2 years of their Presidency. And in only 2 years, I have appointed more judges than any other administration in history. So I think my record is pretty good on that. I do want to continue to do better. And I do believe that there is more we can do.

Now, on the consultation issue, I really think that's one I really need to put back on you because my perception is that we have reached out and we have consulted and we have had a lot of good meetings that were more than just briefings but were really asking for input. If you don't believe that's true, then what I think you ought to do is make a proposal to me and let me see if I can accommodate it so that we can give you and all the people you represent and the people that you work so hard for and do such a wonderful job for the feeling that they do have an open door and a listening ear at the White House, because in the end that is maybe the most important thing.

I have to keep working on these appointments because that empowers people who, in turn, send ripples all across the country. A lot of these judges, for example, will serve for 20 or 30 or more years and will make decisions that will together affect millions and millions of people in positive ways.

But while I am here, your feeling of access and involvement and participation in this administration is perhaps the single most important thing that I can give you. So I want to say again, I would like to invite you to make a proposal about how you think we should do it, what the right way to do it is. I will do my best to accommodate it and, in any case, we will make sure that people feel that we are moving this issue forward.

*[A participant expressed concern about the anti-immigration movement in America and asked how the President planned to help change such feelings of animosity toward the Hispanic community.]*

*The President.* Well, first of all, let me say that I think there is a rising tide of—it's sort of the same—I view the immigration issue rather like the affirmative action issue. In the case of affirmative action, I think there were legitimate questions raised about the way the programs work and whether they need reform.

There were even some who asked honestly whether affirmative action was the right or wrong thing for America. And then there were a whole lot of people that were using affirmative action to drive a political wedge in this country as a false excuse for the problems of the American middle class and the economic anxieties broadly felt by Americans.

I think the immigration issue has sort of flared up again, in my judgment, driven by two factors. One is the general economic anxiety of Americans and the feeling that we are at an all-time high in the number of immigrants we let in every year and that that may be depressing wages and causing economic difficulties.

But I think the far more important problem is the sense that this country has been very undisciplined in its handling of illegal immigration in ways that have cost the taxpayers an awful lot of money and undermined our sense that our laws matter. And so, I think we need to have the same attitude about immigration that I have about affirmative action.

This is a country of immigrants. The fact that we have so many immigrants in this country and that they come from so many different places, from so many different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds is a mother lode of opportunity for us. The fact that Hispanics are fast-moving to become our largest minority population is a godsend, given the fact that for the next 20 to 30 to 50 years our greatest opportunity for growth and trade will be in Mexico, Central and South America, and in the Caribbean. So I see this as a positive force.

And I think we have to do several things. Let me just mention some of the things we are trying to do. I think we have to examine our immigration policies in a factual, calm, non-political way just as we try to do with affirmative action. I think we need to do whatever we can to reduce the burden of illegal immigration without unduly hurting innocent children.

As you know, I opposed Proposition 187 in California. I was unsuccessful, but I did my best. And I did it because I thought it was unfair to children and counterproductive and self-defeating. On the other hand, I noticed that the post-election polls showed that significant percentages of Hispanic-Americans voted for it, not a majority but a significant percentage. And I think the reason is that a lot of people don't like having people who deliberately violate our

laws spend our tax money. I think that is a very—it is very hard to defend that practice, and I don't intend to defend it.

So I have tried to keep America open as an immigration-friendly society while toughening our ability to enforce our own immigration laws and to deport people who are here illegally, especially those who come in contact with the criminal justice system. I also believe, however, it's very important that legal immigrants be encouraged to pursue their citizenship and that we do what we can to accelerate it.

I would like to look at this note here. We naturalized in 1994 half a million people. That's a 50 percent increase over 1992. And we're trying to break that record this year. I have directed the INS to get an extra almost \$10 million to help to process people for naturalization. We're trying to get volunteers. We're doing everything we can in that regard. And I have repeatedly spoken out against immigrant bashing and negative feelings.

So I think that what we need to do is to have a sensible approach to immigration. It needs to be open. It needs to be nondogmatic and nonbigoted. We need to be firm but reasonable in the way we deal with the problem of illegal immigration. And we need to try to get as many of our immigrants who want to do so to become citizens as quickly as possible so that the American people will all see that this is a part of the process of American history which is a good one for our country.

*Q.* Mr. President, we thank you very much. And you'll have our proposal on Monday. And we're here to help you with advice if you need us. Thank you very much.

*The President.* I always need it. I thank you. For the members of the Hispanic community who gave me advice and had input on the affirmative action speech, let me thank you especially. This was a very important day for America. I hope that what I said and the way it was said will reach the hearts and minds of the vast majority of the American people. I believed it very deeply. And I thank all of you who have had any input on that directly or indirectly.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:16 p.m. by satellite from Room 459 of the Old Executive Office

Building to the convention meeting in Dallas, TX. In his remarks, he referred to Irma Flores-Gonzalez, chairman of the board, National Council of

La Raza; and the late Willie Velasquez, founder, Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project.

## Teleconference Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the National Conference of State Legislatures *July 20, 1995*

*The President.* Thank you, Jane Campbell, for your gracious introduction and for all the great work you've done as president of the NCSL. I saw your mother yesterday morning at my affirmative action speech, and I wonder who you're going to produce in your family to start tomorrow off right for me. I'm very glad to see you again.

I want to wish your incoming president, Jim Lack, the best of luck in the coming year. I think he can expect interesting times as well.

Let me express my thanks to your NCSL vice president, Mike Box; your former president, Bob Connor; two of your assembly chairs, my good friend Dan Blue, and Representative Bill Purcell, with whom I enjoyed working at the Vice President's family conference in Nashville recently. It's great to be here with all of you, even if I'm only here by satellite.

You know, the image that is bringing me to you traveled from Washington to a satellite about 22,000 miles away in space, and then back down to Milwaukee, a total of 44,000 miles. Back when I was a Governor, there were times when I felt that Washington was that far away. And it's been very important to me, as you said, to try to make you feel that we're not 44,000 miles away, that we're not living on a different planet, that we can stay in touch with you and that we can work together.

For 12 years I lived with State government, and I saw how it can be the laboratory of our democracy. I know how you drive us forward as a nation with your innovation, your will to experiment responsibly, and your common sense. You are the inspiration for so much of what we're trying to do up here. And I thank you very much for that.

America's State legislators have had a very productive year. I noticed that in Utah, West Virginia, New Mexico, and Montana, statutes were enacted that permit employers to establish

medical savings accounts for health care. Delaware and Ohio have led the way with truly meaningful welfare reform legislation that is focused on protecting our children and moving people from welfare to work, something I've been laboring with for 15 years now. And I understand that those of you from Iowa saw fit to put diaper-changing tables in all the State-house restrooms. Now if that is not a sincere commitment to family values, I don't know what is.

For many of you, your work for the year is done. But in Washington, as you know, we've still got a very long way to go. When I ran for President as the Governor of my State, I did it for two reasons. First, I thought that, on the verge of the 21st century, we were in danger of losing the American dream of opportunity for all and in danger of losing our sense of responsibility with all the social problems that were tearing our country apart. So I wanted to restore opportunity and a sense of responsibility.

But I also wanted to bring the American people together as a community. Politics has been used too long to divide us when what we really need to do is to rise above partisanship to find common ground. In order to do that, Washington needs to inspire the trust of more people throughout the country with a Government that empowers people to make the most of their own lives, empowers communities to solve their own problems, and is far less bureaucratic and less proscriptive.

Now, in the last 2½ years, I believe we've produced some real achievements. The economy is up; inflation is low; trade is expanding; interest rates and unemployment are down. The facts speak for themselves. In the last 2 years, we have cut the deficit by a third, and we're in the process of reducing it for 3 years in a row for the first time since Harry Truman was Presi-