

Remarks to the Hispanic Community in Santa Ana, California August 23, 2002

Thank you all. Thank you all very much. Gosh, thanks for coming today. It's my honor to be back in California—such a vibrant and exciting State. I am thrilled to be here in Santa Ana, and this is a vibrant city. And one reason why is because it's got such an energetic, visionary mayor. And Mr. Mayor, I appreciate—and I appreciate your hospitality. And I want to thank Laura, the first lady of this city.

I know something about marrying people named Laura. *[Laughter]* We both married above ourselves, Mr. Mayor. *[Laughter]* So, I want to thank you, and I want to thank your city council for hosting us here. And I want to thank very much the—I want to thank the fine folks at this beautiful facility for welcoming us. It's a magnificent asset for this community and for this county and for this State.

It's a thrill to be here to talk about some of the priorities for our Nation. We've got some big priorities, and we've got some big jobs to do. But there's no doubt in my mind we can achieve our objectives, because we're America, and we're full of Americans—people bold and courageous and strong.

But before I do so, I want to talk about two Members of the Congress who have joined us, two fine Americans and good, solid citizens and friends of mine: That would be Chris Cox and Ed Royce. Thank you both for coming.

Rosario Marin—she's a former mayor in a little—couple of cities away from here. She's now the Treasurer of the United States of America. And I appreciate you coming, Rosario.

I like to always say hello to the high sheriff. In this case, we've got two high sheriffs—one I appreciate so much, Mike Carona. He's done a fine job. We saw him on TV the other day announcing an important arrest, saying he's going to help do

everything he can to make neighborhoods safe. Sheriff, you did a fine job. And I also want to thank my friend Lee Baca for being here as well. Good to see you, Lee.

Everybody has got to have a good lawyer these days. *[Laughter]* And I've got one of the best, and he is here with his family, vacationing in Orange County. He came over from Washington, DC. He knows a good place to travel to when he sees one. And his name is Al Gonzales, and I want to thank my friend and lawyer, Al Gonzales, for being here.

And finally, I want to thank Francisco Paret for being here. He's a member of the President's Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. And that's a commission we take very seriously. We take it seriously because we understand every child in America must be educated in order for this country to realize its full promise. I don't mean a few children; I mean every single child.

And you've got your superintendent of schools here, a good, young leader. He told me the district is 92 percent Hispanic. My attitude is, so what? That means when you succeed, you've done such a great job for America. That's his attitude. You see, some would say, "Ninety-two percent Hispanic, that's an impossible district." Some believe certain children can't learn. I don't believe that, and neither does the superintendent of schools.

You see, we start with the premise that every child can learn—every child can learn. We set high standards because we believe that every child has got the capacity to learn. You see, if you set low standards in society, you know what you're going to get? You're going to get low results. You have standards so low that you've got these school districts that are going to quit on certain kids. And guess who gets quit on

here in America—children whose parents don't speak English as a first language, for example. Those are the easiest kids to quit on. Or how about inner-city African American kids? They're easy to quit on.

For the sake of America, for the sake of our future, we must first and foremost understand every child can learn, and devise systems to make sure they do. That's why at the Federal level, we're spending plenty of money; but we're also saying: "We trust you all to chart the path to excellence. One size doesn't fit all when it comes to running the public schools." But we're also saying: "Since we believe every child can learn, why don't you show us? Why don't you measure? You see, why don't you tell America or your community or your State whether or not your children are learning to read and write and add and subtract?" And if they are, there will be plenty of praise. But you measure also to make sure that if children are failing, you catch the problems early, before it's too late. No child in America should be left behind. Every child, no matter his or her background, deserves a positive, solid, excellent education.

And we've got to do a better job. And we've got to face the facts that too many of our Latino youngsters aren't learning to read early enough. And that's a problem. If you can't read by the fourth grade, you're not going to be able to read by the eighth grade. And if you can't read by the eighth grade, you can't read in high school. It's a problem, and we've got to take it head on. That's why I want to make sure that we measure. That's why I want to make sure we challenge a system that sometimes has got standards so low. It's what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. So one of the things we've done in the No Child Left Behind is said, "Let's start with first things first. Let's make sure children can read, children from all backgrounds."

Here in California, our new law provides a 50-percent increase to help students from

non-English-speaking homes learn to read. And that's important. No child should be left behind.

And so today, the Department of Education—I'm going to report to you, the Department of Education has awarded California a \$133 million reading grant. And that's to make sure every child can read by the third grade. That's what that's for. I don't mean just a few. I don't mean those from the nice, fancy school districts. I mean every single child.

And one of the reasons why California is one of the first States to receive the grant is because California is using research-based instruction to teach reading. Your State, probably because your superintendent insists on it, has asked the question, "What works?"—not what sounds good, not what feels good, but what actually works. How do you teach kids to read? And that's what you're doing in this State, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for doing that. And we've got a little money to make sure it works and make sure that we focus on every child.

I don't care for the fact that a lot of the youngsters, the Latino youngsters, don't go to college. It's not a good statistic for America. Less than 10 percent go on to higher education. We must—we must work to encourage participation at all levels of education. But we must make it clear to our youngsters from all walks of life, but particularly Hispanic youngsters, that going to college is essential to being able to fully realize the American Dream.

All of us must set that clear goal for everybody, but we also must help. And that's why we've increased Pell grant funding by more than \$2.5 billion from last year's budget to this year's budget. There's a way to help, and we need to help through good scholarship programs like Pell grants.

I also want to note—want you to know that we're focusing on what they call the Latino-serving higher institutions. For the fiscal year 2003 budget, I've asked for more

money to go to support colleges which provide 600,000 Latino students nationwide with educational opportunities. It's an increase of 30 percent.

My point is, is that we've got to make sure that education is affordable and accessible. And we've got to set the goals. We've got to make people understand what is possible here in America. But first things first. We've got to make sure every child learns to read and no child is left behind.

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans is launching what we call the "Yes I Can" national awareness campaign. And it's aimed at encouraging Latino students to obtain a college education. They called together citizens from around the country, they put together this initiative, this plan, this way to convince people that higher education is essential.

Parents can click onto a bilingual web site called yesican.gov—yesican.gov—to learn about college costs, financial aid, and what their children should be asking their guidance counselor about college. In other words, it's a go-by, it's a help, it's a way to encourage people and help people understand that they—that sending their children to college here in America is a way forward.

And finally, about education, I know it's an important part of life for many students in our border communities in Mexico and Canada to attend school here in the United States. There's a lot of transborder crossing on a daily basis, to take advantage of our great educational opportunities. That's what we want, by the way. We shouldn't try to restrict people. It's good for our colleges, and it's good for the Mexican citizens and the Canadian citizens. And so we're going to expand eligibility for student visas, to ensure that part-time commuter students can continue to study here in America.

You know, education is the pathway to success, and there's just example after example of people who came here with nothing except a dream or a hope and love

and got a good education and succeeded. That's what America is about. That's what I love about our country. That's the hope. That's what distinguishes us from many other countries, that we welcome people from all walks of life. We proudly call you an American. We don't say, "Show us your birth certificate, how you're born, where you're born." You're American, and we love you for being in America. We welcomed you to this country.

And, you know, I've got a shining example right there in Washington I want to share a story with you about, because it's a—we've got a little problem up there with this particular fellow. His name is Miguel Estrada. He's a young guy. He came to our country as a teenager. He barely spoke English. He had trouble with the language because he didn't spend any time learning the language. And he got here, and he worked hard—the result of a good brain, brilliant mind. He now has argued 15 cases before the United States Supreme Court.

I've named him to a high bench, but the Senate won't give him a hearing. Here's a kid who comes to our country, works hard, learns the language. He's a brilliant jurist. He can't even get a hearing. I nominated him over a year and a half ago. I want this man to serve as a bright example of what is possible in America. He'll be a great judge, and the Senate needs to act.

Making sure every child is educated is part of making sure America is a secure country and a hopeful country. We've also got to do some other work to make sure we're secure and hopeful. I want to thank the law enforcement officers who are here today. You've got a big job. Our job at the Federal Government is to put a strategy in place that will make our first-responders more effective. It's not only law enforcement; firefighters and EMS.

And we're doing just that. I've actually tried to create a new Department of Homeland Security, to put agencies under one roof, to make sure that the number one priority of the Federal Government is

to protect the homeland. And we need to do that.

I've got to tell you we need to do that, because there are still coldblooded killers out there that would like to hurt America. I want the youngsters to know why. And the reason why is because we love freedom. We value each life here in America. Everybody is important. Every life has meaning. Every life has worth.

And the enemy doesn't think that way. You see, they hate freedom. They hate the idea of people being able to worship freely. They can't stand the thought of Republican and Democrat actually getting along. [Laughter] They don't like a free press, and we do. And we uphold those values, and we will defend them at all cost.

And so for the sake of our freedom, for the sake of values we hold dear, the best way for us to secure our homeland, other than reorganizing and encouraging and focusing on every lead and every hint, is to chase these killers down, one person at a time, and bring them to justice. The best way to protect America, the best way to uphold that which we love dear, is to get them before they get us. And that's precisely what this country is going to do.

We don't seek revenge; we seek justice. We don't want to conquer anybody; we want to liberate people, because every life matters. Every person has worth. I want the youngsters here to understand that when we went into Afghanistan to uphold the doctrine "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorists," that we freed people. Young girls now go to school for the first time, thanks to the goodness of the United States of America and our friends and allies.

No, we're on a mission. I believe out of the evil done to America will come some very—some incredible good. That's what I

believe. I believe these people hit a country, and they didn't understand who they were hitting. And who they hit was a country that's tough and strong and determined, but also a country that's beginning to find its soul and its deep compassion.

See, not only if we're—not only can we achieve peace, which I believe can happen and will happen, that we can address those pockets of despair and hopelessness which exist in America, one person at a time. My call to people in this country is that if you want to join on the war on terror, if you want to fight evil, love your neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself.

You see, this great country can change and will change, one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. One of us can't do everything—I know that—but each of us can do something. And I call upon my fellow Americans to be that person doing something: Mentor a child, help a shut-in, love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself.

No, out of the evil done to America is going to come some great good, because this is the greatest nation on the face of the Earth, full of the most decent and compassionate people.

Thank you all for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. in the courtyard at the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Miguel A. Pulido of Santa Ana; Michael S. Carona, sheriff-coroner, Orange County, CA; Leroy D. Baca, sheriff, Los Angeles County, CA; and Al Mijares, superintendent, Santa Ana Unified School District. He also referred to Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.