

White House Convening on Hispanic

Children and Youth,

The White House

8/2/99

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Transcription In Progress

**White House Convening on Hispanic Children and Youth
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**The White House
August 2, 1999**

(The beginning of Mrs. Clinton's remarks were cut off.)

...important to convene. I want to thank you all for coming, and to say hello to all of those who are watching by satellite transmission and the many others who will see this on a delayed satellite later in the day.

This is the first ever White House Convening on Hispanic Children and Youth. Over the past six-and-a-half years, the President and I have often brought experts to this room—where history has been made time and time again—to talk about how to meet some of the greatest challenges facing our children today. We've looked at school violence. We've looked at child care and early childhood (education?) and development. We've looked at Social Security and Medicare. The President has held many important announcements here. But I truly believe that there are few issues that are more important than the one we will be discussing today. How do our children live in the next century and how to ensure that all of America's children share in the prosperity and the opportunities that...in the future?

We know that, when we ring in the new millennium, in a few short years, there will be 15 million Hispanic young people living in our country. These children are the next generation of parents and mentors, health care professionals, educators, entertainers, Senators, all kinds of jobs in the (country?) And our future depends upon them and how we now treat and nurture their development.

And that is why this discussion is so important.

I started talking about this with members of the Senate and others in the White House who are out of the country, (some time before?) I especially want to thank Lucille because she is the real driving force behind what we are doing today. Congresswoman ... is an expert on child development and a champion for children all over America. We are so delighted that she has been joined here today with members of the Hispanic Caucus who are so devoted to this issue. I'd like to ask all the members of Congress who are here today to please stand.

I also want to thank all of the members of the Administration who are here. I saw coming in, I think, ... who is the director of small business administration...I'd also like to thank Mickey Ibarra, who is the director ofAnd none of this would be possible without the President's right-hand woman and mine as well, when it comes to legislative affairs, ...But there's also someone who I want to acknowledge very specially today

because she's been a friend of mine for more than 15 years. ...laughing in the Blue Room, who would have thought that...Maria ...and I became friends, that she was a lawyer, I was a lawyer and we served together on the board and had a lot in common, but no one would have ever predicted that I would have ended up here nor that she would come with us and become the Deputy Chief of Staff. She proves every day that this administration is devoted to enhancing the lives and interests of all Americans. Maria grew up in California – the child of farm workers –and is now, as I said, an extraordinary Chief of Staff for the President of the United States. And I would like to...

We are also joined by George Munoz, the President and CEO of OPIC; Nelba Chavez, the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Pat Montoya, the Commissioner of Children, Youth, and Families; and two Assistant Secretaries of Education -- Norma Cantu and Mario Moreno. ...introduce them because they are going to be on the front-lines of helping us to implement whatever suggestions and ideas come out of this convening.

And we are very blessed to have a (true roadmap?) of what we should be discussing and how we should be helping our young people, and that is because of the excellent work of the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. This Commission consists of some of the finest educators in the country who've reached out to teachers, parents, and communities to help our country improve the way we think about and educate young Latinos. They've done so under the leadership of a chair – “Cha” Guzman, who brought to this position the passion and vision of a former bilingual education teacher. And a Vice-Chair, Guillermo Linares, who is here, the first Dominican American elected to a city council. Now, I'm told that, in addition to that, he is also finishing his doctoral degree in education. So this is a really nice diversion. I'd like to ask all the Commission members who are here this morning to please stand.

And because of our satellite technology, we're being joined by people in Massachusetts, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indianapolis, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and ... California who are with us. But I'm sorry that we had to change the time... funeral this afternoon. We had to start early in order to be able to attend the funeral. ...dear friend of ours... President and Vice-President... but we have arranged for California to receive this tape at a decent hour later in the day.

There have been so many events that my mind races back and forth thinking about how we are all here today and what we hope to accomplish. I have seen the incredible work of communities throughout our country as they have tackled the problems that confront our young people and particularly our young Hispanic citizens. I will never forget touring PUENTE [Pwen-teh] Learning Center in East L.A. back in 1996. It had been built on an abandoned lot – from the dreams of a community that wanted the best

for their children. All around the area, you could still see graffiti and broken windows. But, the center has never been the victim of any of it.

When I went inside, I met adults learning English, earning high school diplomas, and receiving job training. I saw 4 and 5 year-old children – many from bilingual homes - learning to read, write, and use computers.

And I heard stories, incredible stories, ...around the country. One story like Miguel Flores, whose life has been totally turned around. When he had first been found by PUENTE, he was a young man with lots of potential, but he was hanging out with the wrong crowd. So he was brought into their evening program for high school students (in their tutoring and mentoring?). A UCLA Law Professor tutored and mentored him.

And, when he got into Yale University, PUENTE helped him find a way to pay for it. He has now graduated from Yale. He hopes to get a law degree. And he is here with us today. And I'd like to ask him to stand as a representative of all of those young people. We could have filled, not only this room, but the entire White House grounds spilling out to the capital with similar stories because we know that in communities across America right now, there are innovative, educated people working in pre-school programs, in schools, in after-school programs in all kinds of settings to reach our children. And that is exactly what we want to highlight today. Because we've tried for the last six and a half years to do what we could in Washington to make a difference in families' and children's lives, but we know that there has to be a partnership with families and communities and schools and healthcare facilities and all of the various institutions that make up our country. It has, of course, made a difference, what we've done here, but we need always to be reminded, in Washington, that we can only do so much here. And then we have to turn to people around the country.

Now, there are many these days who promise to fight for children, and the schools and for communities. But, I believe that we should follow my mother's advice with me as a child. And that was, "Watch what they do, not what they say." Because there are many people how have all the rhetoric, that does not match by action or commitment.

Think of what we together have done. It's made a difference to working families that we raised the minimum wage, expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, and lifted millions of families out of poverty. It's made a difference that we've seen expansion in Head Start and college loans, increased access to child care and after-school programs. We are looking for ways to provide health insurance to millions of families.

There probably isn't anything more important to the future that we're talking about today than education. And it has made a difference that we have never given up on our commitment to bilingual education, or our belief that every single child deserves smaller classes, higher standards, and safer, more modern schools that are not falling down around their ears. Because we know that we have to focus our resources on education if we expect our children to flourish.

It was the Commission, the Hispanic Caucus, the Education Department, and the White House that came together to create the Hispanic Education Action Plan to improve

the quality of education for Latino students. We should all be pleased that the Administration won about \$500 million in 1999 to help Hispanic youth master the basics of English, reading and math, and to ensure that they stay in high school, prepare for college and graduate. And, for the year 2000, the President has proposed over \$650 million to build on these education programs. But the trick is getting what the President proposed through the Congress.

With the deficit gone and unemployment at record lows, we face a fundamental choice about whether to move forward or backwards: Do we retreat into our own worlds and say, "Well, I'm fine, my family is fine, my business is fine, I don't have to worry about anyone else." Or do we take advantage of this historic opportunity and confront the tough challenges we still face in our society?

This is not the time to approve a big tax cut – and forget about our obligations to all of our children. As we look toward the day when Hispanics will be our largest minority and Hispanic children will fill more seats in America's classrooms, we cannot afford a tax cut that will dramatically cut education funding at every level, including programs in the President's Hispanic Education Agenda.

We know we've got to continue to press forward and that means we have to get more Hispanic children into Head Start. We've got to get them to graduate from high school and college. We know that there are still too many Latino teens getting pregnant. And we know that there are still too many of our children and youth without health insurance. Far too many are born into poverty – and never have a fighting chance at the future that all children deserve. These are not somebody else's children. These are all of our children. And we should begin to act...

My real dilemma as I was getting ready for today was trying to figure out how to eliminate the many, many examples that I would personally like to talk about that we will get to talk about when we get into the program and we've got the brochures and we've got the descriptions of the program for you, but I couldn't get out of my mind visiting, about five years ago in the San Fernando Valley, a school that the vast majority of students were Hispanic – and in the past, student achievement and attendance had been quite low, but finally, parents and teachers and a principal, and community and business leaders who cared about children said "enough is enough." They made that school a charter school which meant that the parents and the teachers ran that school. And I saw parents who were coming to school themselves, staying afterwards to get tutored in English and learning how to use computers. The families and teachers banded together to get rid of the crack house that was right outside the boundary of the school. The children started wearing uniforms so there wasn't any distinction between what kind of home a child came from and how much they could afford on clothes. We had parents who didn't have all those many resources themselves, coming together to cool their energy on behalf of the school. Academic achievement soared, they had above 90% attendance rates, and the school was named a National Blue Ribbon School. Now that is a powerful example of what can be done when we have a partnership around children's needs.

Today, I am pleased to announce a number of new efforts to lift up the education and future of Hispanic children in America.

For example: Head Start is taking new steps to better serve Hispanic children, something we've been working on for quite some time. AmeriCorps will increase the number of its Hispanic members. The Department of Education will ensure that schools participating in Title I are held accountable for helping the three million Hispanic students enrolled in them learn proficient English and meet all of their requirements in the challenging standards in core academic subjects. Under the leadership of Secretary Bill Richardson, the Department of Energy will team up with the "Latino Science and Engineering Consortium" to identify, train, and nurture the next generation of scientists, engineers, technicians and educators in math and science.

I am also pleased to announce that the private sector has announced that it has commitments as well. Over the next 3 to 6 months, AT&T will team up with Hispanic organizations and work to close the technology gap for Latino youth throughout the nation. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which has already pledged \$83 million for after-school programs, will now work to increase Latino participation in them. And, thanks to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Hispanic media leaders, many of whom are with us today, have made commitments to create PSAs, radio programs, talk shows, newspaper supplements, and other magazine features to improve the lives of Hispanic youth.

Now these are important steps. But, I hope that out of this convening, we will make clear that these are not just steps for other people, they're something for all of us to do.

I want to close by talking about another one of the valuable members of the White House staff here and that is one of my top aides, Patti Solis Doyle, who was the first person I hired when my husband said he was going to run for President. She was one of six children born to Mexican immigrant parents in a poor neighborhood in Chicago. Her mother made it only through the sixth grade. Her father, her late father, a wonderful man, only had a 3rd grade education. But those two parents, despite their own lack of education always, always believed that education was the key for success for their children. And they've had remarkable reasons to know that they were right, so as hard as they had to work, Patti's father would say over and over again to each of his children: "you must always value yourself." Well, Patti's brother is an alderman in the city of Chicago. Her other siblings are successful parents and workers, and citizens. And if we do nothing else out of this convening, I hope we will send a message loudly and clearly to everyone in our society that when it comes to our children, we must give them a very clear and affirming message. And I think Patti's father's words were as good as any we could have. "You must always value yourself."

Because for many years from now, there will maybe perhaps be another convening in this East Room in 50 or 100 years, or maybe it'll be held in virtual reality by that time, and people will look back at us and they will ask, "Did we just talk, or did we do? Have we been able to meet the challenges that our children face?" And I hope that they will see this meeting as the beginning and not the end of a great national conversation. And I hope that they will say that we did not leave any child behind, any Latino child, that we did not leave any community, any Latino community behind, that we helped everyone with the most important task we faced, mainly in the raising of children.

You know, I think it takes a village. I think it takes an American village. I think it takes a Latino village. I think it takes a village of all of us committed to our children. And I believe that many of you in this room are making good on building that kind of future for our children and for that, I'm very, very grateful.

I want to thank again everyone gathered at the satellite sites.

And now I want to introduce someone who has been on the forefront of bringing these issues to our attention and making sure that nobody is left behind. Lucille Royball-Alard(?) is not only a Congresswoman from California, she is the first Mexican-American woman to be elected to Congress, the first Latina to be appointed to the House Appropriations Committee, for which we are very grateful, and the first woman ever elected chair of the very important Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

So it gives me great pleasure to introduce her to you.