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Nat'l Hispanic  
Dinner

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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
AT THE NATIONAL HISPANIC SCHOLARSHIP FUND DINNER  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

MRS CLINTON: Thank you very much for that introduction, but more, thank you for your leadership. On behalf of the President I want to congratulate you and the Fund on 20 years of bringing hope and opportunity to young people across our nation. I believe so strongly in what you are doing. I don't know that there is any more important event occurring in Washington or around our country this evening than this gathering of those who appreciate and recognize all of the potential that the millions of young people in this country have--and in particular, those in our Hispanic communities across the country who as Ernest said, "need both encouragement and resources to participate fully in the educational system not only for their own sakes but for the entire American community."

All Americans owe a debt of gratitude to the Fund because you, through your support, have helped promising young men and women fulfill their dreams of becoming teachers and doctors and lawyers and business leaders and public servants. We in the Clinton Administration and in the federal government owe a special debt of gratitude because you have helped produce some very valuable members of this administration.

Nearly 20 years ago a scholarship helped Juanita Fernandez, the daughter of a railroad agent, leave her South Texas town to enroll at a very faraway place called Harvard University. The scholarship made it possible for Juanita to go home for Christmas, to make those absolutely essential long distance phone calls to your parents during the first months and years of school and even to buy winter boots and coats to survive the cold Massachusetts winter. In short, the scholarship helped her get both the material and emotional support she needed to stay in school and excel in her studies. Today she is counsel to the assistant attorney general for civil rights in the Department of Justice. And hers is just one of the many stories I could tell and that you know. In this room tonight there are young men and women who have been scholarship recipients, and I know you share my pride in them. They and Juanita are some of a record number

of Hispanic men and women who are serving our country in this administration.

You'll be hearing later from one of the most distinguished members of the administration, Secretary Cisneros, who has, through his tireless efforts, been a leader and a strong voice on behalf of all Americans, but particularly the young and particularly Hispanic youngsters. We are also very proud and grateful for the contributions of Secretary Pena. But there are so many more that I cannot risk calling out all their names for fear of forgetting someone. We are also aware of the leadership in Congress, and I know you will be hearing later from the chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressman Pastor, who has been also an extraordinary, consistent voice on behalf of education and the needs of our young.

Now why, is this perhaps more important today than it has been for quite some time? Well, simply put, education has historically been the route of worth for all who are willing to work, make the necessary sacrifices in order to realize their own God-given potential and to make contributions to the larger society. That has been one of the best investments our country has made--an investment that starts with families who invest their time and energy, their love, their attention, their discipline and their resources in their children. But beyond that also investments made in communities that recognize the importance of education, and certainly beyond that in a nation that has historically understood how essential education is.

I am always stunned when I recall the fact that in the midst of our Civil War, President Lincoln and leaders in Congress passed the Land Grant College Act. Can you imagine, in the middle of the strife and agony of those times we had leaders far-sighted enough to understand that the war would come to an end, and more importantly, the need for building new futures would always be present? And so they put aside the troubles of a real war long enough to make an investment in the future. At every point in our nation's history, we have turned to education. We have relied upon it, and we have encouraged young people to seek it, and we have provided resources to make it possible for all to have that opportunity.

Now more than ever, as we face not only a new century but a new millennium filled with challenge and uncertainty, we face a stark choice. Will education be available primarily to those whose families can afford to send their children to college? Will we begin to close the doors of opportunity, pull up the ladders that many of us in this room were fortunate enough to climb because many, many people held us up 'till we got to that first rung? Or will we, true to our own values and our history, recognize that we have an important task before us: to continue investing in our young people and to be sure that every young

person, whether they live on the border of Texas or in the cold winters of Boston, Massachusetts, have the chance to make it possible for themselves to realize the American dream.

In order to do that we need a coalition--a coalition between caring, committed parents and families who encourage young people to stay in school and stand against the popular culture and peer pressure that sometimes convince our young people, and particularly our young people in our Hispanic communities, that they don't need to finish even high school. We need neighborhood people who are mentors and coaches and leaders who are there constantly to catch young people when they are about to fall and put them back on the right track.

You are honoring some very distinguished Americans tonight because of their contributions to this Fund, but also because of their greater contributions to the work of the communities of which they are a part. When you think about the work that the Archbishop has done in San Antonio, you can see not just a contributor to the Fund, but someone who understands that we don't have a child to waste. When you think about the kind of support that the corporate sponsors have been giving to this effort, they understand that if we are going to continue to build the strongest economy in the world, we need young people who are able to do the tasks required in the 21st century.

And we know there is a great disparity growing between those who are educated and able to work within the information age and those who face increasing frustration because their skills are not up to the challenges that confront them. So when we talk about the kind of investment that we need, we have to recognize it is not just somebody else's responsibility. It is everyone's. There is a role essentially for the family, but also for the neighborhood, for the school, for the church. There is an essential role for business, both in the contributions that business can make to such efforts as the Fund, but, equally importantly, in the way that employees are encouraged to continue their own education and to be able to be both good workers and good parents. And there is a role for government.

Government has an essential role to support the basic safety net and to lead the way in investing in education for the future, which is why the President and this administration believe so strongly in providing college loans, in providing scholarships, in making sure that financial obstacles will not prevent any youngster from attending college.

If we look at what the Fund represents, it really does signify the kind of coalition of partners that our children need today. And you have done a marvelous job. As I look at the accomplishments over the past 20 years, I see people who

understood what it would take to make it possible for these 26,000 scholarships to be given.

And I'm pleased that this dinner tonight will be used to support a Presidential Scholars program that will enable Hispanic scholars in our country to work with government, business and academia to address the educational needs of the Hispanic community. Along those lines, I am pleased that the Department of Energy is providing \$200,000 of scholarships for students of Hispanic backgrounds who wish to pursue studies in environmental restoration or waste management. Those awards will be made to students who attend a two-year or a four-year post-educational institution in the United States. This is an effort that is meant to do several things: to increase the number of quality students, to ensure diversity in the workforce and to emphasize the importance of environmental work. The National Hispanic Scholarship Fund will distribute the scholarships. This will be the first year that this Fund will receive the DOE Grant, and we are very pleased that this kind of partnership can occur.

I hope that as you support this Fund you will also support the other elements necessary to create the resources that our young people need. I hope you will work with the President and this administration to support the increase in Pell Grants and to make college loans more accessible and flexible. I hope you will support the idea that the President put forth in the State of the Union to increase the amount of money available for work-study programs. That is so essential for so many of our students. I hope you will continue to be a leader in supporting the administration's work in the very important White House Initiative on Excellence in Education for Hispanics. This coordinated federal effort is identifying the problems and finding solutions that will enable every Hispanic child to get the education he or she needs.

The President knows, and all of you in this room know, that this is no time to retreat on our nation's fundamental commitment to education and to our children. On behalf of the President I want to state not only his commitment to helping this fund reach its goals, but also to fight any mean-spirited and short-sighted attempts to prevent young people from being able to go to college if they are qualified and have the heart inside to be able to take that challenge.

In this time of great change and uncertainty, it is sometimes easy for some among us to forget our common values and shared priorities. But, however great the challenges we face, let us not forget that we are a nation of immigrants, a people of diverse beliefs, cultures and opinions who are bound together by our common faith in democracy, our commitment to our children and our hope for the future. This country has survived and thrived for more than two centuries because those who came before us were

willing to take risks for a better life, willing to strike out, sometimes against great odds, because they believed there was a better future waiting. It has continued to thrive because citizens have always risen to the challenges before us, to pull together, to recognize that we are one nation and to make our contributions so that that nation worked for all who were willing to work for themselves.

On the eve of this next millennium, there is much that we can, much that we must and, I believe, much that we will do together. And there is no more important task than the nurturing and care of our young and the opportunity to see learning light up the eyes and lives of every little boy and girl. You, by being here this evening, have staked your place in the kind of future I want to see for my daughter--a future filled with the hope and optimism that made America great and will continue to give us the greatness we deserve. Thank you all very much.

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