

## **Remarks**

by members of the

### **New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force**

For the

### **17<sup>th</sup> Annual "Somos El Futuro" Legislative Conference**

**April 24, 2004**

BUENAS NOCHES Y

BIENVENIDOS A LA DECIMASEPTIMA CONFERENCIA ANUAL LEGISLATIVA DE LA ASAMBLEA DEL ESTADO DE NUEVA YORK PARA LA COMISION DE ASUNTOS PUERTO RIQUENOS e HISPANOS

This is an exciting time for our communities and a challenging one as well. This year's Legislative Conference will provide us with another opportunity to:

celebrate our cultures;

review past accomplishments;

revisit old friends; and

chart our course for the near future.

This special gathering and its celebrations have been tempered with workshops that have focused our attention on the social, economic and political issues confronting our state and nation.

We are all here with a genuine desire to provide leadership and build a better future for everyone in our communities.

We know that a strong and healthy Hispanic community translates into a strong and healthy New York State.

This important annual event has become increasingly significant in addressing the public policy concerns of New York's Hispanic communities.

It provides a forum for the development of legislative and budgetary initiative of concern to our communities.

At the same time, it affording us networking opportunities that engage our community in critically important policy issues.

While our communities have daunting problems to overcome, we also have much to be optimistic about.

Our growing role and importance in state and national elections is a prelude to great future achievements.

Statistics are abundant with this regard:

By 2025, the nation's five largest states - California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois - will be home to 40% of all Americans.

These five mega-states will also be home to 46.6 million Latinos.

These five states will elect close to 40% of all members of Congress and control 68% of the electoral votes needed to win the Presidency of the United States.

Within our lifetimes we will see major changes in the social and political composition of our nation.

We should prepare ourselves to be major players and contributors to the intellectual affairs of this nation.

This will mean protecting and upholding the founding principles that created this country;

improving our environment, strengthening the economic and social standing of our nation;

and working to make sure the political process outlined in the American Constitution is not changed to deny us this opportunity.

But the question we ponder here tonight is the following:

When destiny calls will we - as a people - be ready?

Millions of Hispanics throughout this state are still confronting huge economic and social struggles daily.

Tens of thousands of our children are not finishing school, opting to leave a system they think does not care for them.

Tens of thousands more are working in low wage, low-skill jobs that barely provide them with the income they need to survive.

The majority of our children attend schools built in the early part of the last century;

In overcrowded classrooms with uncertified teachers; and

With a bureaucracy that seems to have forgotten its basic reason for existence.

WE now know that the huge explosion of growth in the Hispanic community, combined with the growing problem of low educational attainment will become a grave problem for our communities, our state and for the nation.

WE can no longer allow the status-quo to prevail. This state and this nation have the wealth to make sure that every child in all our neighborhoods;

receive a quality education;

is taught by qualified teachers; and

attends school in a system that demonstrates its mission by making the changes needed for success.

This state has reached a critical mass in terms of its failure to properly help educate our children.

Critical in terms that the problems created seem insurmountable and will require tremendous resource to fix.

There are no alternatives left other than to forcefully attack the institutionalized neglect of our children.

Scholars, economist, community activists are all in agreement:

Unless we see a dramatic increase in the educational attainment of our children we're going to see a dramatic negative impact on the economy, especially in states with large Hispanic populations.

Obviously, our priority as community leaders is now clear. But there are forces working against us. We all know them, many of us have experienced the decay and neglect of our educational system first hand.

But tonight, and in community gathering like this, we can regroup and remember that in numbers comes strength.

We can reenergize and remind ourselves that we are not alone in this struggle.

THIS time, we are not alone walking down a dark street in El Barrio in 1945;

THIS time, we are not the newly arrived migrants from La Isla;

THIS time, we are not the marginals that noone pays attention to; and

THIS time, we know that we have the political power to make a difference.

RECENTLY, News media from across the Nation has fixed their attention on our growing political strength.

Studies, polls, surveys are being used to tell all Americans that we - Hispanics - are not a monolithic group;

That we have no real political party allegiance and differ in our views.

Well let us affirm tonight that this is not the case.

That when it comes to issues of FAMILIA;

That when it comes to issues of our pride in our LANGUAGE and the language of our parents and grandparents;

That when it comes to issues of our RELIGIOUS beliefs;

That when it comes to issues of JUSTICE, and LIBERTY;

That when it comes to issues of preserving our DIGNITY;  
That when it comes to issues of working to STRENGTHEN THIS NATION;  
WE ALL DO INDEED THINK THE SAME!

THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

Our communities, working with our friends, can continue to work to challenge our democracy into living up to a progressive reality, filled with promise and compassion.

With a growing purchasing power that is in the hundreds of billions of dollars and with a growing political influence created by our growing electorate, we can work for change.

We can make sure that 100 years from today, when our children learn of the great reformers of our time,

that names like Santiago, Nieves, Martinez, and Cruz

will be mentioned in the same sentence as CHAVEZ, PANTOJA, JACKSON and KING.

We can work for change, so that in the **words of Abraham Lincoln;**

This nation shall have a new birth of freedom and

That this government of the People, by the People and for the People will not perish from the face of the earth.

Amigos y Amigas, this is much easier than we think. We just need to remember the words of a great Latino thinker and philosopher of ages past.

**In the words of Jose Marti:**

No es que seamos pequeños,

es que estamos de rodillas. Levantemonos! LEVANTEMONOS.

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