

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 4, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
SENATOR JOSEPH M. MONTOYA,
CONGRESSMAN MANUEL LUJAN,
AND
FERNANDO DE BACA
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR HISPANIC AFFAIRS

THE BRIEFING ROOM

AT 2:00 P.M.

MR. ROBERTS: Ladies and gentleman, we have three persons who participated in the meeting with Mrs. Armstrong and the Hispanic American Members of Congress, who are here to give you a briefing on that.

We have Senator Joseph Montoya of New Mexico, Congressman Manuel Lujan of New Mexico and the third gentleman on the right there is Mr. Fernando DeBaca, who has just been named the Special Assistant to the President for Hispanic Affairs.

I think we will just start with the Senator to start off the proceedings and just proceed in the order in which they were introduced, and let each of them comment on the session and then, if you have questions, I am sure they will be glad to entertain them.

Senator.

SENATOR MONTOYA. Thank you very much, Mr. Roberts.

Ladies and gentleman of the press, first of all, I want to say that we are very grateful to President Ford for the time that he gave us this morning. He was the most generous. We spent an hour and 40 minutes with him and we discussed in depth many of the problems which affect the Spanish surnamed population of this country.

Many of us advocated a better Government role in the field of bilingual education and other educational programs in this country of ours. Also, we went into the matter of Federal employment, not only in high positions of Government, but also in the low echelon of Government.

We also discussed with him better employment opportunity in the private sector. We also discussed the Cabinet level committee which is subject to extending legislation pending in the United States Senate. He indicated that he would be very much in favor of extending the Cabinet level committee and implementing its role in providing better opportunity for the Spanish-speaking people of this Nation.

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Now that, briefly, is what we discussed. And I want to say that the President in his introductory remarks really convinced us of his awareness of the problems of these people throughout this country and his attention was really very serious and very well intentioned and we are grateful to him and I feel that he is desirous of doing something affirmatively from the White House in directing programs which will be beneficial to these people.

MR. ROBERTS: Thank you.

Congressman Lujan.

CONGRESSMAN LUJAN: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

I think Senator Montoya covered it pretty well on what our discussion was with the President.

My impression was that one of the basic programs that needed to be picked up a little bit was the bilingual education program which certainly is one of the ones that shows more of the difference.

Beyond that, we spoke about opportunities for economic development both within the Government by checking with, for example, the Forest Service as to grazing permits in the areas, the building of dams, which would enhance the economics of an area.

As far as Government agencies were concerned, it was pointed out to the President that one of the contributions to Government where the Spanish-speaking could make a real contribution would be in the State Department by naming people who have those capabilities to posts in the Forest Service.

We were all, of course, very pleased that the President took as much time as he did and we thank him for that opportunity.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. DeBaca.

MR. DE BACA: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

I am the newly appointed Special Assistant to President Ford for Hispanic Affairs and I will be working in the area of domestic policies as they affect the Spanish-speaking and advising the President accordingly. I will be working, of course, very closely with the Cabinet committee on opportunities for the Spanish-speaking, but also with each of the major domestic agencies of the Federal Government.

My impression of this morning's meeting was a very positive one. I feel the meeting was characterized by the same openness and frankness, candor of the President that he has demonstrated with other -- looking at or discussing other special problems of different groups of this country.

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I was impressed by some of the things the President had to say. He admitted we have problems with regard to the delivery of services to Spanish-speaking, that we need to make certain that there is freer and greater, wider participation in Government by Hispanic Americans.

He recognized the characteristics of the Spanish-speaking American as one who has love of family and certainly love for one's country.

Generally speaking, he emphasized his very strong support and commitment to the Spanish-speaking of this country, some 10.8 million of us who reside in all 50 States of this great Nation, largely in nine major States in the Southwest, Puerto Ricans largely, in the Northeast in New York and New Jersey, and, of course, the Cuban Americans down largely in Florida and other parts of the country as well.

Perhaps having said that, and having heard the Senator, we could now entertain some questions.

Q Was there any discussion, sir, in the meeting of the Puerto Rican disturbances in Newark and whether these were related to what the Government has or has not done?

SENATOR MONTTOYA: They were just mentioned by Congressman Badillo and there were no specifics except to say that these people needed some kind of attention from the Government.

Q What did the President say?

SENATOR MONTTOYA: He was very positive in giving assurances to all of us when we brought up questions, that he certainly would be interested in solving some of these problems and he told us, "Don't expect results overnight," which we appreciated, it will take some time.

Q Senator, what do you think are the chances for extending this bill?

SENATOR MONTTOYA: I think the chances are very good, especially now that the President has indicated his support for it.

Q Was there any discussion of U.S. policy toward Cuba?

SENATOR MONTTOYA: No, there wasn't. That wasn't even discussed.

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Q Have you all met the new man who is going to be Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs?

SENATOR MONTOYA: I have not.

CONGRESSMAN LUJAN: I would like to make one more point that came up during the discussion that I think is relevant, and that is that it was pretty well emphasized throughout the meeting that, with the exception of programs like bilingual education and that sort of thing, is that the problems that affect the Spanish-speaking are pretty much the same problems that affect all other citizens of the United States.

The inflation factor was mentioned as being one of the ones that affects everyone and the opportunity for economic development is one that affects all groups and not just the Spanish-speaking.

Q Now that we have a vacancy, I believe, on the Cabinet Committee for Spanish-Speaking Opportunity, did you all make any recommendations to him as to who should succeed Mr. Ramirez?

SENATOR MONTOYA: No, we did not.

Q Are you going to?

SENATOR MONTOYA: As far as I am concerned, I am not going to.

Q Senator Montoya, was there any discussion of attempts which were revealed during the Watergate hearings to corrupt the Government program for Spanish-speaking Americans so as to win their alliance to the Republican party?

SENATOR MONTOYA: Well, we mentioned that the Cabinet level committee had been used in the last campaign and we asked the President to make sure that in the restructuring of the personnel of the Cabinet level committee that, if there was, that he should instruct them to administer the affairs of that committee in a bipartisan way.

Q Did he agree to that?

SENATOR MONTOYA: Yes, he agreed very firmly on that.

Q So he agreed to keep it out of politics?

SENATOR MONTOYA: That is correct.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 2:10 P.M. EDT)