

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
SERVICE EMPLOYMENT REDEVELOPMENT/JOBS

THE INTERNATIONAL INN  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

2:14 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very, very much for the opportunity of coming over and meeting with you for a very few minutes and to make some observations and comments.

I understand that you are all active participants either on the Board of Directors of SER or people who are working with SER in an effort to improve the job opportunities and the job responsibilities of the members of Hispanic communities, some 60 million, as I understand.

I should say to all of you that over the last several months I had hoped that I might meet with other organizations that have a very close and deep connection with the members of the Hispanic community in the United States, but for one reason or another it was not feasible.

We do hope that in the months ahead we can do something affirmatively and effectively in the way of job opportunities and job responsibilities for those that you represent.

This is a very meaningful requirement, in my judgment, because historically I think it is recognized that those opportunities and responsibilities have not been available.

The situation we find ourselves in today, unfortunately, is the economic period of recession, although the record is quite clear at the present time that we have what some people allege to be a bottoming out and we are now starting upward.

What is the significance of that development? For a period of five or six months, we had nothing but bad news. At the present time, we are seeing much much more good news than bad news.

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I am confident that in the third and fourth quarters of this year, and even beginning now, the situation is going to be considerably brighter.

What that means is that for the last five or six months, while we were in slide toward the bottom of the recession, we not only lost jobs for everybody, but for those in the minority areas of one kind or another suffered much more seriously than others.

The way that I think we can meet the challenge is in two directions: One, to make positive that our economy does recover, and I am completely and totally confident that it is going to happen. On the other hand, as we move out of the economic distress we have been in, we have to make honest and conscientious efforts to make certain that these job opportunities and these job responsibilities are available on a fair and equitable basis -- in some instances kind of make up for the discrimination that existed in the past and to insure that there is security and opportunity in the future.

If I might take just a minute or two and talk about our economy because it does involve a reduction in unemployment, but more importantly, an increase in job opportunity, at the present time, we have roughly 84 million people gainfully employed in our society. We had, as I indicated a moment ago, a substantial job loss, as well as increased unemployment.

The job loss for a period of four or five months was roughly 400,000 per month. In the last two months, we have had an upturn, and we have achieved a job increase of about 450,000.

I think this trend is going to continue, but in the meantime, we have been able to make some headway in other areas.

To refresh your memory just a bit, a year ago at this time we were suffering an inflation rate of approximately 12 to 14 percent, unbelievably high as far as by number of circumstance.

By doing the right thing, to the extent that man can control the economy, we have reduced that rate of inflation 50 percent -- it is now the annual rate of about 6 percent. That is still too high, but it is vitally important to all of the people who are employed and, just as important, if not more so, to the people who are unemployed.

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What I am saying is that we have to work on a two track program, one to improve our economy with inflation, and at the same time provide greater employment.

I am confident that the American people are in a position mentally and otherwise to meet this challenge, and I can assure you that your Government is going to do everything it can to meet the challenge. I think we have made substantial headway.

But, I reiterate that just improving the economy is not enough. We do have to make certain those that you represent, whether it is in Government or whether it is in private employment, have an opportunity for a job and an opportunity for increased responsibility in the job.

I am always an optimist. I condition it with effort. People such as yourselves who are participating can make a meaningful contribution to helping others than those that you represent.

I see here some people that I have met before in various organization meetings where I have met with a group such as this, and I am delighted to have the chance to renew those acquaintances.

I must say that in the White House we have in Fernando DeBaca a person that is working with me and trying to keep the communication lines going with all of you and with others. We have Alex Armendaris here and we have others in the Administration.

I can add one final subfootnote. We are making a maximum effort in the various boards and commissions and other job opportunities -- an effort to see to it that the Hispanic community is fairly and properly represented, and this is essential.

QUESTION: Mr. President, one of the critical issues today that our community is very concerned about is the extension and expansion of the Voting Rights Act that for the first time will include the Spanish-speaking people in this country.

Are you supporting the expansion of that Act that would include and guarantee the same franchise to the Spanish-speaking people of the country?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe in protecting the voting rights of every American citizen, including any minority group, which in this case, of course, includes the Spanish speaking.

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There is a serious problem that has developed in the United States Senate, as you well know. The Act expires August 4. I had a meeting yesterday, and again I talked with some Members of Congress this morning.

I am very concerned that the Senate, in the compressed time that is available, might not have an opportunity or won't conclude action on the extension of the legislation.

I think that legislation, its extension is of maximum importance. You really have one of four choices: The simple extension of the existing law, the approval, in the second option, of the House version, the third is to broaden the Act so it takes in everybody in all 50 States, and fourth, which is the option I would oppose most, is no action -- but the last is a very serious possibility.

I can assure you that I am working with Members of the Senate to try and avoid the last option because if that takes place, you in effect have to start all over again. And with a law that has been on the statute book ten years, now, it is better to extend it, to improve it, than to start really from scratch again.

QUESTION: Do you expect the expansion to Spanish speaking?

THE PRESIDENT: I would accept it, of course I would. But I think it might well be in this period of time another option that might be preferable to make it effective in all 50 States rather than in the eight Southern States plus the seven additional States that have been added in part by the House version.

It might be better, quicker and more certain to make it nationwide rather than the 15 States that are now included in the House version.

Thank you all.

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(AT 2:27 P.M. EDT)