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Telephone 202/225-2961

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY
AMERICAN GI FORUM
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS
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We live in times of unprecedented challenge and change.

Old practices and traditions are giving way...old injustices and prejudices are being rooted out and destroyed.

Most of us can look back 20 years -- to 1948 -- and we know how far we have come. But then we look forward -- to the year 2000 -- and we know how much remains undone -- how, in a sense, the battle has just been joined.

I can remember the Democratic National Convention of 1948 when some of us led a small revolt against the establishment -- when we called upon the Democratic delegates -- and all Americans -- to step from the shadows of states rights into the bright sunshine of human rights. We won that fight.

That same year -- 1948 -- Dr. Hector Garcia was fighting another battle in the cause of human rights. An American soldier who had been killed in action -- Felix Longoria -- had been refused burial in Three Rivers, Texas because of his Latin background. Dr. Garcia fought this unjust decision -- and he won too.

Today the body of Private Longoria rests in Arlington Cemetery -- the same place where our beloved President John Kennedy and our good friend Senator Robert Kennedy are now buried.

This struggle to secure simple justice for one Latin family helped convince Dr. Garcia to expand his one man crusade against intolerance and inequality. He and his followers founded the American GI Forum -- and they chose the philosophy of St. Francis of Assisi as their guide: "...where there is darkness - light; where there is hatred - love; where there is despair - hope."

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The early supporters of the GI Forum came from the cotton fields of South Texas -- from the sheep and goat raising lands of Southwest Texas -- from the oil country around Midland and Odessa -- and from the big cities.

The GI Forum grew rapidly across the entire Southwest, for Spanish-speaking Americans needed a voice. They needed an organization to help them battle age-old prejudices and discriminations.

Today the GI Forum stands as one of America's great national organizations together with LULAC, The Community Service Organization, and others -- not just striving to secure equality and justice for Spanish-surnamed Americans, but for all Americans.

The Forum's 20 years have seen many victories and much progress. Think how far we've come.

Let me make one point absolutely clear: Your voice has been heard in Washington -- it has been heard in the states with large Latin populations -- and it will be heard this fall when the American people will choose a President, a Congress, and their state and local leaders.

I could spend time reviewing for you the accomplishments of the past several years -- the Latins appointed to high public office -- the projects funded -- the many injustices which have been corrected.

We know that more has been done than ever before -- but we also know that even more remains undone...and that our job is not to seek satisfaction from past achievements, but to look forward -- with some impatience and urgency -- to the tasks ahead.

First among those tasks is peace -- a reduction of the international tensions which are today drawing far too great a share of the world's resources away from urgent human needs.

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You did not fight the wars of the past -- your boys are not fighting in Vietnam today -- so that there would be more danger...more misery...more war. America has fought its wars and built its unparalleled defensive strength to achieve a groundwork for lasting and honorable peace based on self-determination of nations and dignity of man.

Now I believe it is time to move ahead with equal courage to seize the rewards of peace. I believe that much of the world is ready for reconciliation. I have called for a new era in American foreign policy based on peaceful engagement, rather than containment and hostile confrontation.

That demands peace in Vietnam -- a stable, lasting and honorable peace settlement in Vietnam at the earliest possible moment.

It means getting to the table as soon as possible with the Soviet Union to talk about mutual reduction of both offensive and defensive weapons.

It means a massive international effort to start closing the gap between rich and poor nations.

It means taking every possible American initiative for a peaceful world.

And there are urgent tasks here at home -- in every city and in every town and rural community.

We know these are special problems faced by many Americans of Latin descent. As I said at the El Paso hearings: "Our purpose is grander than simply guaranteeing...the opportunity to achieve a decent American standard of living...We are talking about providing a material basis on which a cultural tradition that is precious to America can grow and flourish."

This cultural tradition was recognized with passage of the Bilingual Education Act -- the first federal recognition of the special importance of the ability to speak two languages.

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Now we must launch a major program of bilingual education, including teacher training, scholarships, text books, curriculum reform and research.

We must end -- now -- discriminatory practices in employment -- we must adequately fund the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission so good men like your former national President, Vincente Ximenes, can do their work.

If I am President, I pledge that the federal government will be the model employer of Latins -- and that means from the White House on down.

This includes more responsibility for the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs -- a specific agenda of priority items -- and a secretariat to help the committee accomplish its objectives on schedule.

It includes giving the poor a greater voice in the planning and implementation of local community programs, such as Head Start, and expanding the migrant and legal aid programs.

It includes giving the able-bodied men the chance to support their families with dignity and pride. As Cesar Chavez told me last week in Los Angeles: "We want no special favors -- merely the chance to build a union so the members can help themselves."

The farm workers of America must have this chance -- now. They must be covered by the National Labor Relations Act -- with full rights under the law to organize and bargain collectively.

The present minimum wage coverage for farm workers must be extended and we must push forward to achieve other fringe benefits which factory workers have enjoyed for a generation.

As Vice President, I cast the tie-breaking vote to kill an attempt to revive the bracero program. Now we must come to grips with the problem of the green-card commuter.

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We have no desire to damage the economy of our good neighbor to the South -- but we cannot accept a situation which severely restricts the economic opportunities of our own citizens.

This is an injustice we must act to correct. If I am President, I will act -- without delay.

In my campaign, I have already proposed that young men be selected for the draft on the basis of the fair and impartial random system -- the national lottery. And draft boards should be fully representative of the local community -- and that means a fair proportion of Latin members where there is a large Spanish-surnamed population.

These are the goals I will pursue as President.

These are the objectives we can strive for together -- in much the same spirit we displayed 20 years ago -- in carrying the civil rights fight in the Democratic National Convention...and in founding the American GI Forum.

Now we can continue this struggle together. I ask your help.

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