



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles**

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**“Bridges not Walls”
An Address to the United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
As prepared for delivery
May 3, 2007**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

"Estoy encantado de estar en Mexico."

I want you all to know what a special privilege it is for me to be here today.

What an unthinkable honor, really, for a kid from East LA to be standing here, representing the greatest city in the world on a mission in the land of my grandparents' birth. And to speak in front of this audience of such powerful men and women. My mother never would have believed her eyes. I'm sure she's looking down right now. "Make sure you brought enough business cards, Antonio!"

Here we are, in the heart of the Mexico. Gathered in one room are the captains of industry, the people who hold the future of Mexico in your very hands. The decisions you will make in the coming years will shape our shared destiny on both sides of the border. It is a great privilege for me to speak to you.

And since time is money, I do not intend to waste it dwelling on trivial matters. I want to go straight to hard truths this afternoon. The clock on the wall is telling us that the critical hour has arrived. Now is the time for us to finally confront the complex issues facing our two countries in an honest and a sensible manner. Our children will inherit the world created by our deeds, or diminished by our inaction, and we cannot afford to miss the meaning of the moment.

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As everyone knows, there is an intense debate taking place in my country over the issue of immigration. There are those who believe that we North Americans can only hope to resolve this issue by building a wall. I came to Mexico to say, that we don't need to build walls, we need to build bridges.

When I think about the issue of immigration, I can't help but remember the old saying popular in my family: "Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres." "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are."

Friends, with so much heat and so little light illuminating the debate over the relations between the United States and Mexico, we'd all be wise to heed this simple article of wisdom. As citizens of the United States, we can't possibly know who we are, without understanding our relationship, without comprehending our common history, without cherishing our friendship and without embracing our common destiny with the people of Mexico.

Lest we forget, Todos somos Americanos.

Our fates are intertwined and indivisible, and we need to stand and to stay united. United in supporting the economic advancement of both of our countries together. United in promoting peace, human rights and the rule of law in a world ever more divided by war, violence and terror. United in the fight against drugs, gangs and crime, and all those who would prey upon innocent people on both sides of the border.

Most of all, we need to stay united in our insistence on a set of common values. The same values embodied in the founding document of the Organization of

American States, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. It proclaims, we are "all born free and equal" and we all have an obligation to conduct ourselves as "brothers" and sisters "to one another."

Todos somos Americanos.

Now, I know that there are some who would disagree when I make the claim, but I would submit to you all that nowhere, nowhere is this truth more apparent, nowhere does this note sound with richer resonance than the City of Los Angeles. In my city we know, without our connection to Mexico, we are nowhere. There would be no Los Angeles.

Forty-four settlers came from Sonora and Sinaloa. They laid the first bricks of a pueblo along the banks of a beautiful river they called "El Rio de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula."

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And from those humble beginnings rose a great metropolis. The world's creative capital. The gateway to the Pacific Rim. A beacon for dreamers all over the globe that continues to shine bright today.

And we are an international city made great by the strength of our bond to the nation of Mexico. We see it every day. All around us. The connections of commerce, of culture, of family of friendship between my city and Mexico – between my city and all the nations of the Americas – continue to define who we are as Angelenos.

Los Angeles is enriched by the largest concentration of Mexicans living outside of Mexico City. We also have the most Guatemalans outside of Guatemala. More Salvadorans outside of El Salvador and more Nicaraguans outside of Nicaragua.

And in Los Angeles, we believe that this diversity is our competitive advantage. It's what makes us strong. It gives us a clearer vantage point on the future.

In Los Angeles, we understand that immigration is a problem that must be soberly and seriously addressed on both sides of the border.

And Angelenos know that our future prosperity depends on raising the standard of living in both the North and the South.

I have no doubt that we can build a bridge to that brighter future.

We can't afford to fail.

If we don't answer the challenge of this great technological age by finding rational and cooperative solutions to the human challenges we face, our children will inherit the burden of a less prosperous and peaceful world. A world in which they will live alienated from their neighbors. Lost to the light of their common heritage and divided by a grim wall of fear and misunderstanding.

Now is the time to embrace a more optimistic vision. Why not chart a course that accepts the fact of our interdependence? Why not find the widest, brightest and most sensible path to a shared prosperity? And if such a path does not presently exist, why not use our imaginations and our intelligence to create it?

And, ladies and gentlemen we need to face the fact. We won't get there unless we have the strength to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and the practical difficulties of the present.

One thing I love the most about my country is our diversity and our spirit of innovation. The United States is not a country defined by one culture, one

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language or one history. We are a human family bound together by a central theme: that every individual has the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

And this idea continues to speak to people everywhere -- people of every color, language, nationality, faith. In business terms, we might consider it – perhaps – the most successful marketing slogan of all time.

And because of the resonance of this promise, my country was built with the energy, intelligence, creativity and strength of immigrants, some of whom as we know, did not volunteer for a new life in a new land, but were stolen away from their homelands and sold as slaves.

Their blood, their sweat, their tears, their sacrifices made us what we are as a nation. They made us powerful around the world. And they succeeded against great odds.

Every new group that set sail for the harbors of the North American continent faced hardship, discrimination and the struggle of poverty. They were branded with epithets. They were punished with cruelty. They were mocked for their culture and their religious beliefs. They were deprived of their proper rights and wages. They were relegated to working the most demeaning jobs. They were targeted by laws designed to prevent them from becoming citizens in the land they were helping to build. And they forged ahead. And America, the world, is a better place because of their triumph.

They were German, Italian, French, Slavic, Swedish, Jewish, African, Russian, Greek, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and let's not forget about the Irish.

When I read what is said about today's immigrants from Latin America, I can't help but think how the anti-immigrant forces defamed the Irish back in the 1800s.

Back then, a political party – ironically called the American Party, but better known as the “Know Nothings” – said that the cities of United States were being overwhelmed by immigrants from Ireland.

Immigrants who “stole jobs” from the country's citizens and lowered their standard of living. Who couldn't be trusted because of their Catholic beliefs. Who were responsible for gang violence and other criminal endeavors. Who contributed to overpopulation and posed a severe threat to the unity and identity of the country.

I remember this history and I thank God that the United States never built a wall in order to keep out the Irish.

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Ladies and gentlemen, forty-five years ago, a great American visited Mexico bearing a message of hope.

A descendant of immigrants who fled Ireland during the potato famine, it was his destiny to become the youngest man ever elected President of the United States. President Kennedy came to Mexico City for an official visit in 1962.

I would like to read you some of the words he spoke here, because they remain relevant today.

He said:

"The revolutions of the United States and of Mexico were, in their beginning, political revolutions.

"But in the case of Mexico -- and I think this is true of the entire hemisphere --we have come to realize that our obligation in the 1960's really is to match political independence with economic independence, to indicate that with a system of political freedom can also go a system of economic well-being."

"That is the assignment which history has placed upon the people of the United States and the people of Mexico."

Today, as the Mayor of Los Angeles and the son of Mexican immigrants, I say to you that we have yet to fulfill the assignment.

Others may succeed in building a wall to address this dilemma if we do not seize this moment to build a bridge instead.

Leaders in the North need to acknowledge the intrinsic fairness in providing a permanent pathway to citizenship for the nearly 12 million immigrants living and working in the United States.

Leaders in the South need to recognize the conditions of the desperately poor as the central question of Mexican political life.

Politicians in the United States must be fully committed to reforming our immigration laws in a manner which recognizes the fact that our demand for laborers from Latin America is continuing to fuel a steady supply of illegal immigrants.

Leaders in the South must acknowledge that enforcement is our common challenge. And enforcement on Mexico's southern border remains imperative for both of our countries.

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Together, we need to lead a fight against trans-national gangs and organized criminals. And together, we need to affirm the rule of law – to recognize that illegal immigration hurts us all.

It is unfortunate and shameful when so many Mexicans leave behind their homeland and their families in order to rise above poverty. When they feel they must walk away from their culture and customs, their towns and their churches. When a country this ancient and great watches helplessly as its lifeblood is drained away.

Every nation has a right to secure its borders. Even the Mayor of one of the largest cities in the world must present identification and receive permission to enter Mexico, as well as every other country in the world.

It is only right for us to respect one another's sovereignty and independence. War and terrorism make the issue of border security one of special significance for the United States. Any reform of US immigration policies will require a great effort by Mexico to secure its borders.

The political and business leaders of Mexico must also take an honest look into the mirror and embrace change. Most immigrants are fleeing from the failed economic policies of their home governments.

The bridge we must build is not just a bridge between two countries. It is a bridge between the rich and the poor, who are imprisoned by walls of economic injustice. It is a bridge between the Indian, the Mestizo, the black, the Asian and the white, who are separated by walls of prejudice. It is a bridge between the Christian, the Muslim and the Jew, who are divided by walls of tragic misunderstanding.

"Dime con quien andas y te diré quien tu eres."

For all eternity, the United States and Mexico shall journey side by side.

Ours is a common destiny. Our fates are indivisible.

If we do not share victory, we will share failure.

Todos somos Americanos.

And I hope one day we will be able to tell the tale that, when our moment came, we were awake and ready to rise to the occasion. And whenever our insecurities advised us to protect ourselves with a wall, we had the courage to build a bridge instead.

Gracias. Thank you. God bless you all.

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