

a great country, *nuestro amigo*, Mexico, and to your *salud*, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. at Hacienda Temozon. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Calderon. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**Remarks at a Dinner Hosted by
President Felipe de Jesus Calderon
Hinojosa of Mexico in Merida**

March 13, 2007

Mr. President, Mrs. Zavala, members of your government, Governor of Yucatan, the mayor of Merida, other government officials, distinguished guests: *Buenas noches, y gracias*. Laura and I are delighted to be back in Mexico. We're grateful for the warm hospitality of President Calderon and Mrs. Zavala. We appreciate the chance to dine in this beautiful setting, which calls to mind Mexico's rich history and its bright future.

For Laura and me, the connection to Mexico stretches back for decades. *Somos Tejanos*. We have come to admire your country, the people, and your culture. As Governor, I worked closely with my counterparts on this side of the border and made a lot of friends in Mexico. As President, Mexico was the first country I visited and the first country whose leader I welcomed for a state dinner at the White House. Over the past 6 years, I've traveled all across your nation—from here in Merida to Monterrey to Los Cabos on the Pacific Coast. And this evening the relationship between Mexico and the United States is as strong and is as vibrant as it has ever been, and President Calderon and I intend to keep it that way.

The ties between our countries are deep and lasting. We are united by the bonds of family. We are united by the growing commerce that crosses our border each day. And we are united in our faith in an Almighty God.

The accident of geography made our two countries neighbors, but common values have made us friends. The most important

value we share is our belief in democracy, and last year, the world saw Mexican democracy in action. Across the country, large numbers of voters turned out for an election that was open, honest, and really close. Come to think of it, it sounds familiar to me. [*Laughter*] Your fidelity to the democratic process was the mark of a nation growing in confidence and freedom. And in the end, the Mexican people chose a good man to be their President.

Shortly before his inauguration, President Calderon came to see me in the Oval Office. I was impressed by his character, his leadership, and his devotion to the Mexican people. He's an innovative thinker with a vision of justice and prosperity for all in this nation. And during his first 100 days as President, he's shown his commitment to delivering results for all the people he has served. In my conversations today, he shared his willingness to work with members of all political parties and with people from all sectors of the civil society.

Today we discussed the President's top priorities. I share those priorities. His top priority is to provide security throughout the country. He's taking bold steps to enforce the rule of law, and to crack down on organized crime and drugs, and reform the judicial system.

The United States is a strong partner in these efforts. We've got work to do on our side of the border. People provide drugs because there is a demand for drugs, and the United States must do a better job of reducing the demand for drugs. And at the same time, I look forward to close cooperation. We'll work with the President and other Presidents in our region to interdict the supply of drugs.

President Calderon also knows the importance of creating new opportunities for Mexico's economy. He's laid out innovative policies to combat poverty and to create jobs. I found one of his policies most interesting—rewarding Mexican companies that hire first-time workers. And I appreciate his strong commitment to housing and infrastructure in southern Mexico.

He's called for economic reforms that encourage competition and fight corruption. He understands the importance of free and

fair trade. The United States welcomes a strong Mexican economy, and we fully understand that we must work together to facilitate a smooth transition to full trade, especially on sensitive issues such as corn and beans.

President Calderon holds deep convictions on the matter of migration, and so do I. Our nations share a 2,000-mile border, and that should be a source of unity, not division. So we're working together to keep both sides of the border open to tourism and trade and closed to criminals and drug dealers and smugglers and terrorists and gun runners.

I appreciate the President's commitment to secure Mexican borders on both the north and the south. And I told the President today—and I'm going to keep repeating it while I'm here in Mexico—that I know our country must have comprehensive immigration reform. We are a rule of law. But it's important for the American citizens to understand that family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River and that it's in our Nation's interests to have a comprehensive immigration law so we can uphold the great values of America, values based on human dignity and the worth of each individual.

And so, Mr. President, it's been a good day. We spent a lot of time talking about important issues in a very constructive and friendly way. I appreciate your candor. I appreciate your being straightforward. And I too would like to offer a toast to good people of Mexico and its leaders.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:16 p.m. at Hacienda Xcanatun. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon; Governor Patricio Jose Patron Laviada of Yucatan, Mexico; and Mayor Manuel Jesus Fuentes Alcocer of Merida, Mexico. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Calderon. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks in a Discussion With Training, Internships, Exchanges, and Scholarships Program Recipients in Merida

March 14, 2007

The President. I'd like to thank you all for joining us. One of the best things America can do is help people realize their dreams. The best way to realize dreams is through education.

I'm so happy that you all have joined me to share with me your experiences from one of our most effective programs, which is a program all aimed at improving the human condition. I'm proud of the citizens of the United States who show great concern for citizens in our neighborhood. And I thank you for coming to share your experiences.

Victor, would you like to start? I mentioned you in *un discurso en los Estados Unidos* about the benefits of this program. I understand you went to Bettendorf Community College—Scott Community College? Okay. Well, tell us, Victor, your story.

Victor Lopez Ruiz. I want to express my deepest appreciation for this opportunity. Thank you, Mr. President, for sharing the story in your speech last week. Your words fill me so happy. And I have the encouragement to keep working in my community. I want to express my gratitude, as well, to Becas CASS and USAID for selecting me for this scholarship in 2004. I received also an associate degree in international business and trade at Scott Community College, Bettendorf, Iowa.

And finally, I would like to thank everyone that supported me and helped me for this opportunity, my dreams come true—especially my family. I had to face many challenges to get an education, but I learned that with the right attitude and a lot of effort and commitment, everything is possible.

At the age of 12, I had to leave my community to be able to study high school. I faced several obstacles, including the fact that I did not speak Spanish, because my language is Tzotzil. Now I speak three languages. I had to work to support my education. This is how I was able to study. I still continue fighting for my dream today, which makes me value them even more.