

## **Joint Declaration of Latino Immigrant Summit February 10, 2004**

As people who were born and raised outside of the United States, as residents and citizens of this nation and with deep roots in this country, we want to testify to the urgency of reforming the current immigration policy and systems in the United States. The announcement made by President Bush on January 7th, of the proposal known as "Just and Secure Immigration Reform for Temporary Migrant Workers" has generated a great deal of interest among immigrants who are victims of failed and obsolete immigration policies.

To respond to this outpouring of interest, Latino immigrants have gathered in a summit in Washington, DC to analyze the meaning of the proposal, identify our common interests on this issue, and define an action plan that can allow the needs and interests of our communities to play a leading role in the national debate on immigration reform. This effort can only contribute to a better understanding of the contributions of immigrants to the progress and well-being of the United States.

After careful deliberation on these issues, we have reached the following conclusions:

1. That President Bush's proposal is a starting point for an agenda that we have been advocating for many years. We are well aware that the immigration question can be divisive and that it requires leadership to present a national proposal on a topic as controversial as this one.
2. That we fully agree with the President on the vital role that we as immigrants play in our society and to the contributions to the wellbeing and progress of our nation. We agree especially with the President's statement that our current laws do not reflect the value of the contributions of immigrants nor do they correspond to the best values and traditions of our nation. In particular, we would like to honor the memory of the immigrants who have died crossing the border, as well as the many soldiers of Latino origin who have sacrificed their lives serving in the armed forces.
3. That our communities are ready and willing to take on the arduous task of turning the promises of immigration reform into reality along with the President, Congress and both political parties.
4. That the main element of the proposal announced by the President, a temporary worker program for immigrants, is merely an alternative for foreign workers who would like to come to work in the United States. We must however take the necessary precautions to avoid the unfortunate outcomes of the Bracero Guest Worker Program from 1942 to 1964.
5. That the President's proposal represents an important point of departure in the search for more effective solutions for undocumented immigrants who already reside and work in the United States. We believe that the following points represent key elements of an immigration reform policy that is just, comprehensive, long-term, and visionary:

- a. A gradual immigration adjustment program that would allow immigrants who live and work in the United States to obtain legal permanent residency and subsequent United States citizenship.
- b. An increase in the numeric limits currently in place, regarding the system of quotas and preferences. The current system leads to waiting lists for permanent residency that can stretch for too many years. One element of this reform could be a limit of no more than six months for the processing and resolution of any immigration benefit application. We further believe that rules in place before 1996 should be restored for processing requests for permanent residency and citizenship.
- c. The creation of a national initiative to facilitate the fullest integration and participation of new immigrants into the political, economic, and social life of our nation.

In addition to the reforms we have noted here, we believe that the current economic conditions in the countries with strong patterns of out-migration is the most salient factor driving people to travel to the United States as a last-ditch alternative to achieve a dignified way of life. Therefore, it is urgent to work simultaneously on the reform of our economic policies and relationship with our neighbors in Latin America.

Through family remittances that last year reached the 40 billion dollar mark, we are making a substantial contribution to the economies and the development of our countries of origin. It is time for the U.S. to play a more significant role in this area as well.

Finally, we call on President Bush and members of Congress from both parties to work together to take concrete and immediate steps to advance legislative processes that can lead to the immigration reforms outlined here. For our part, we have agreed to return to our communities with a renewed commitment to educate, organize, and mobilize residents and our allies. In an electoral year we are conscious of our role as the second largest ethnic group in the country, so we commit ourselves to mobilize every registered voter in our communities to support those candidates who respond to the needs and interests of our communities.