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President Obama Addresses 2011 National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast

U.S. Sen. Charles “Chuck” Schumer and U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan Speak to Guests

WASHINGTON, DC, May 12, 2011 – President Barack Obama delivered the keynote address at the ninth National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Conference this morning to a crowd of more than 600 Hispanic faith and civic leaders at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium in Washington, D.C.

“These past few days have not only been a time of prayer and a time of reflection for all of you. They’ve also been a time to lend your voices to the causes that you’re passionate about. And I want you to know that I’m listening,” the President said. “When you lend your voice to the cause of creating jobs and opening opportunity for all communities, I hear you. When you lend your voice to the cause of educating all of our children, not just some, to succeed in the 21st century, I’m listening. And when you lend your voice to the cause of immigration reform, I am listening.”

The conference, presented by Esperanza, one of the nation’s largest Hispanic faith and civic nonprofits, brings clergy of different denominations and leaders of Latino community-based organizations to Washington, D.C. for celebration and advocacy.

“The President of the United States honors us today, and his presence here is a powerful reminder of the important relationship President Obama has with the Hispanic faith community and Esperanza,” said Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., Esperanza’s founder and president.

The National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Conference gives Esperanza an opportunity to celebrate key faith and civic leaders in the Hispanic community, as well as to meet with members of Congress and Obama Administration officials during its Capitol Hill Breakfast and Briefing.

Along with President Obama, speakers at Thursday’s Prayer Breakfast included U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, U.S. Sen. Charles “Chuck” Schumer, D-NY, and U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio. The event also feature rousing performances from Latin music sensations Frankie Negron, Julissa, Danilo Montero and Lilly Goodman.

The President focused his remarks on the importance of passing a comprehensive immigration reform bill in Congress, and he urged the attendees to advocate for a sweeping bill that overhauls the nation’s flawed immigration systems.

“Comprehensive reform is not only an economic imperative or a security imperative, it’s also a moral imperative” said the President. “It’s a moral imperative when kids are being denied the chance to go to college or serve their military because of the actions of their parents. It’s a moral imperative when millions of people live in the shadows and are made vulnerable to unscrupulous businesses or with



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nowhere to turn if they are wronged. It's a moral imperative when simply enforcing the law may mean inflicting pain on families who are just trying to do the right thing by their children."

In his remarks, U.S. Sen. Charles "Chuck" Schumer, D-NY, laid out the economic case for immigration reform, noting that immigrants contribute substantially to the U.S. economy and a fair immigration policy would help build more jobs.

"Slowly but surely, I am seeing more and more of my colleagues beginning to come around to the notion that fixing our broken immigration system is the right thing to do for our country and for our economy," said Schumer. "They see that immigration reform is not just a Latino issue, it is an issue that affects all Americans, and an issue that needs to be addressed so that our economy can compete in the new 21st century world."

Esperanza presented two key awards at the Prayer Breakfast. The Image Award was given to Eduardo Garcia Valeca and Jayne Rager for their bravery in surviving a harrowing kidnapping in Mexico, and the Mujeres de Esperanza "A Certain Woman" Award was presented to Rev. Eve Nunez of Arizona for her groundbreaking work for children.

The 2010 conference was a memorable one. On Wednesday morning, former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich announced his plans to run for president in 2012 at the Capitol Hill Breakfast and Briefing, and then spoke to conference attendees on his views on immigration reform.

"We want everybody in America to have the right to pursue happiness, and that means everyone in America needs to have some type of legal status," said Gingrich.

On Tuesday, a coalition of African-American, Caribbean-American and Hispanic pastors—the African American Clergy for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (AAC CIR)—joined together at a press conference to call for a more civil tone in discussions of U.S. immigration policy, and urged immigration foes to stop their efforts to divide ethnic groups in order to derail comprehensive immigration reform.

Established in 1987 by the Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia to improve the lives of Hispanics in North Philadelphia, Esperanza is now the largest Hispanic faith-based community development corporation in the United States. Esperanza provides community development, workforce development and education services in Philadelphia, and capacity building and advocacy through its network of more than 10,000 Hispanic organizations and nonprofits nationally.

"Time and again, in our families and in our neighborhoods, we have seen the transformational force of Hispanic Americans in our economy, our culture and our politics," said Rev. Cortes. "The stories of Hispanic families are a vital part of the story of America, and one that transforms our nation today and into the future."

For more information about Esperanza and the Prayer Breakfast, please visit <http://www.esperanza.us>.