

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

**Remarks Prepared for Delivery by
U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao
LATINA Style 50
Washington, D.C.
Thursday, February 3, 2005**

Thank you, Barry [*Salzberg, U.S. Managing Partner, Deloitte & Touche*].

It's good to see so many Latinas from the Administration of President George W. Bush, including Veronica Vargas Stidvent, Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Labor; Cari Dominguez, Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Josefina Carbonel, Assistant Secretary for Aging; Cristina Beato, Acting Assistant Secretary for Health from the Department of Health and Human Services; and Theresa Alvillar-Speake, Director of the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity at the Department of Energy.

It is great to be back for the fourth year in a row to honor those organizations which are providing the greatest opportunities to Latinas. Today, we celebrate and recognize all those who realize the value that Latinas bring to the workforce.

The first thing I want to do this afternoon is to commend *LATINA Style* magazine for sponsoring these awards. By highlighting those organizations that are helping to create opportunities for Latinas, you are raising the profile of working Latinas throughout this nation.

I also want to commend the Latina workers themselves. You are showing that the key to long-term success is the same for everyone: a strong work ethic, a commitment to education and the ability to adapt to changing economic conditions.

As an American of Asian descent, I know the challenges that new immigrants face as they try to make a life in this country. I know how hard they work and the dreams and hopes they have for themselves and their families. I also know the importance of outside encouragement by others to help in building a better life. And I know the importance of the bonds of family as new arrivals try to lay the groundwork for a firm future.

That's why it's very encouraging to see that some of our nation's best-known employers are recognizing the tremendous value you bring to the workplace.

They provide great models for others who want to tap this terrific pool of talent!

For example, the company of the year works with Hispanic college associations to establish internship programs for Latinas. Through these internship programs, Latinas are able to experience and work in a larger world that had not been accessible to them, build new networks and realize the many new opportunities that they never knew existed. And it sponsors several mentoring and leadership programs, five women's task forces and two Hispanic employee networks.

Other employers honored today aggressively search for talented Latinas at conferences and job fairs.

Economic empowerment is the key to success. By giving Latinas equal access to opportunity, these employers are helping them achieve their dreams and making our country stronger.

That's so important to this Administration, which cares deeply about the well-being of Hispanic workers. President George W. Bush is committed to ensuring that the doors to opportunity remain wide open for Latinas.

As many of you know, President George W. Bush has a special bond with the Hispanic community. He grew up in Texas and speaks Spanish. His first trip abroad was to Mexico—signaling the priority he places on good relations with Latin America.

It should come as no surprise that President George W. Bush has appointed more Americans of Hispanic heritage to top positions in the federal government than any other President in history. As the President is fond of saying, he searched for the most talented and qualified people to serve and that is just how things turned out. He knew where to look!

The Department of Labor shares the President's commitment to hope and opportunity for Latinas.

The Hispanic community is the fastest growing segment of our nation's population. In less than a century, more than one-third of America's population will be of Hispanic heritage. So the Department of Labor has a tremendous stake in ensuring that the Hispanic community is vibrant and prosperous.

That's why we've taken specific steps to ensure that Hispanic workers have equal access to opportunity. We're making the Department of Labor's programs and protections accessible to those with limited English proficiency. We have instituted a toll-free number for Spanish speakers.

The Department's enforcement agencies have increased the number of Spanish-speaking investigators—many of them Latinas—to ensure that all workers are safe and fairly compensated. That's especially important for vulnerable immigrants. DOL's Wage and Hour Division is committed to improving compliance in industries that employ a disproportionate number of immigrants. Last year, Wage and Hour recovered more than \$43 million in back wages for nearly 85,000 workers in these industries.

In addition, the Department is translating its health and safety materials into Spanish and distributing them throughout the workplace. The Department's outreach efforts have helped reverse the upward trend in fatalities among Hispanic workers for the first time since 1995. In fact, fatalities among Hispanic workers have fallen by 11.6 percent since 2001.

In July, the Department of Labor sponsored a Hispanic Safety and Health Summit. Employers at this event learned how to reduce illnesses, injuries and fatalities among Hispanic workers.

In October, the Department hosted its second nationwide Opportunity Conference to help small businesses and community organizations serving the Asian Pacific and Hispanic American communities.

The Labor Department has also launched a Hispanic Worker Initiative. This is an effort to help Hispanic Americans prepare for and find good jobs that pay good wages and offer solid career paths for the future.

We have established a Hispanic Workers Task Force, which is dedicated to improving outreach and preventing fatalities among Hispanic workers.

The Department has given \$2.7 million to Esperanza USA and \$2 million to the Latino Coalition. These grants help fund programs that train young people for good jobs.

And I'm pleased to note that each year more Latinas are assuming new leadership responsibilities at the Department. More than 52 percent of all Hispanic employees at the Labor Department are now women. Like President Bush, we know where to look for talent!

And so do all the employers being honored here today! Thank you, again, for helping Latinas achieve their dreams.

And thank you to *LATINA Style* for encouraging employers who are providing equal access to opportunity by sponsoring these awards. You highlight the talent, drive and achievements that Latinas bring to the workforce and to our nation.

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