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# Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials

Washington, DC | June 28, 2008

## NALEO Opening Statement

I'm proud to be here today not just as the Democratic nominee for President, but as the first African American nominee of my party, and I'm hoping that somewhere out in this audience sits the person who will become the first Latino nominee of a major party.

You know, being here today is a reminder of why I'm in this race. Because the reason I'm running for President is to do what you do each day in your communities – help make a difference in the lives of ordinary Americans. And that's what I've been working with Latino leaders to do ever since I entered public service more than twenty years ago.

We stood together when I was an organizer, lifting up neighborhoods in Chicago that had been devastated when the local steel plants closed. We stood together when I was a civil rights attorney, working with MALDEF and local Latino electeds to ensure that Latinos were being well represented in Chicago. And we marched together in the streets of Chicago to fix our broken immigration system. That's why you can trust me when I say that I'll be your partner in the White House.

And that's what you need now more than ever. Because for eight long years, Washington hasn't been working for ordinary Americans. And few have been hit harder than Latinos and African Americans. You know what I'm talking about. You know folks like Felicitas and Fransisco, a couple I met in Las Vegas who were tricked into buying a home they couldn't afford. You know about the families all across this country who are out of work, or uninsured, or struggling to pay rising costs for everything from a tank of gas to a bag of groceries. And that's why you know that we need change in this country.

And while I respect John McCain, it's not change when he offers four more years of Bush economic policies that have failed to create jobs at a living wage, or insure our workers, or help Americans afford the skyrocketing cost of college. That isn't change.

Now, one place where Senator McCain used to offer change was on immigration. He was a champion of comprehensive reform, and I admired him for it. But when he was running for his party's nomination, he walked away from that commitment and he's said he wouldn't even support his own legislation if it came up for a vote.

If we are going to solve the challenges we face, you need a President who will pursue genuine solutions day in and day out. And that is my commitment to you.

We need immigration reform that will secure our borders, and punish employers who exploit immigrant labor; reform that finally brings the 12 million people who are here illegally out of the shadows by requiring them to take steps to become legal citizens. We must assert our values and reconcile our principles as a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. That is a priority I will pursue from my very first day.

And we can do something more. We can tear town the barriers that keep the American dream out of reach for so many Americans. We can end the housing crisis and create millions of new jobs. We can make sure that the millions of Latinos who are here illegally get the same health care that I get as a member of Congress. We can improve our schools, recruit teachers to your communities, and make college affordable for anyone who wants to go. And we can finally start serving our brave Latino fighting men and women and all our soldiers as well as they are serving us. We can do all this. Si se puede.



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But I can't do this on my own. I need your help. This election could well come down to how many Latinos turn out to vote. And I'm proud that my campaign is working hard to register more Latinos, and bring them into the political process. Because I truly believe that if we work together and fight together and stand together this fall, then you and I – together – will change this county and change this world.

#### NALEO Closing Statement

You know, a few years ago, I attended a naturalization workshop at St. Pius Church in Chicago. And as I walked down the aisle, I saw people clutching small American flags, waiting for their turn to be called up so they could begin the long process to become U.S. citizens.

And at one point, a young girl, seven or eight, came up to me with her parents, and asked for my autograph. She said she was studying government in school and wanted to show it to her third grade class. I asked her what her name was, and she said her name was Cristina. I told her parents they should be very proud of her.

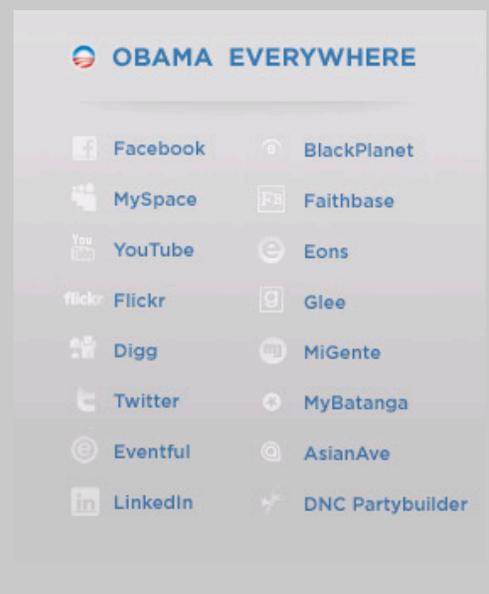
And as I watched Cristina translate my words into Spanish for them, I was reminded that for all the noise and anger that too often surrounds the immigration debate, America has nothing to fear from today's immigrants. They have come here for the same reason that families have always come here, for the same reason my father came here – for the hope that in America, they could build a better life for themselves and their families. Like the waves of immigrants that came before them and the Hispanic Americans like Ken Salazar whose families have been here for generations, the recent arrival of Latino immigrants will only enrich our country.

Ultimately, then, the danger to the American way of life is not that we will be overrun by those who do not look like us or do not yet speak our language. The danger will come if we fail to recognize the humanity of Cristina and her family – if we withhold from them the opportunities we take for granted, and create a servant class in our midst.

More broadly, the danger will come if we continue to stand idly by as the gap between Wall Street and Main Street grows, as Washington grows more out of touch, and as America grows more unequal. Because America can only prosper when all Americans prosper – brown, black, white, Asian, and Native American. That's the idea that lies at the heart of my campaign, and that's the idea that will lie at the heart of my presidency. Because we are all Americans. Todos somos Americanos. And in this country, we rise and fall together.



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