

**Presidential address at the 2008 Hispanic Chamber of Commerce conference
By: Sasha H. Skrine**

President George W. Bush addressed the U. S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (USHCC) for the third and final time as president on March 12 at the 2008 USHCC Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

“As the leading advocate for our nation's more than 2.5 million Hispanic-owned businesses,” said USHCC Board Chairman David C. Lizarraga, “we are greatly honored by President Bush's decision to address the key leaders assembled from across the country.”

Bush touched on a range of topics including the entrepreneurial spirit of the Hispanic community and the No Child Left Behind Act, but spent the majority of the hour speaking on free trade agreements.

“I'm blessed to be a Texan and I got to see firsthand, as governor, the unbelievable drive of Hispanics who live in my state,” Bush told the group of more than 300 Latino business and civic leaders from across the nation during his address.

Bush, who said No Child Left Behind is “working”, thanked the USHCC for their “strong support” and for recognizing early that many Latino children were denied the “great promise of America because they didn't get the good education that we expect.”

Bush discussed advancements in the federal contracting process which he said has become more open to small and minority-owned businesses.

The president also discussed what he referred to as a “missed opportunity” in Congress regarding the failed immigration bill. If passed, the bill would have coupled tough border enforcement measures and a crackdown on employers of illegal immigrants with a pathway to citizenship for 12 million illegal immigrants, a new guest-worker system for foreigners seeking entry and dramatic changes to the system of legal migration

USHCC conference attendees applauded the president's description of a day in the future when, “a President signs an immigration bill that secures our borders, respects our laws, and treats people with dignity.”

Bush illustrated that the U.S. had free trade agreements with only three countries when he came into office as opposed to 14 countries now, and the stakes are high, especially in South America, he said.

“Three more agreements are on Congress' agenda this year: Colombia, Panama, and South Korea...the agreement with Columbia is especially urgent,” Bush said.

Bush asked for the support of the USHCC as Congress moves forward with these agreements.

According to the U.S. Census, it is projected that by 2010, Hispanic-owned firms will represent 1 out of 10 businesses in the U.S and collectively generate over \$465 billion a year in revenue.