

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SENATOR MEL MARTINEZ (R-FL)

SUBJECT: U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY

MODERATOR: KEITH HILL, MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BOARD OF GOVERNORS

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT

DATE: FRIDAY, MAY 12, 2006

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MR. HILL: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Keith Hill. I'm an editor/writer with BNA. I'm a member of the National Press Club's Board of Governors.

I'd like to welcome club members and guests who are in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to point out that if you hear applause, it will most likely come from our guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, not

necessarily from the working press, even though there are some exceptions, but we won't mention those.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the Press Club website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Press Club members can also access free transcripts of our luncheon at our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940; again, that's 1-888- 343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club contact us at 202-662-7511; that's 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind members of future speakers. On May 19th, Mayor Beverly O'Neill of Long Beach, California and president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors will be our guest. On May 22nd, Senator Arlen Specter, our speaker's colleague on the Senate, a Republican from Pennsylvania, will be our guest.

On May 23rd in the morning, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, another senator, will be our guest; and on May 23rd at our regular lunch time, Paula Kerger, president and CEO of PBS.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards that are provided at your table and pass them up to the head table and I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all head table guests are introduced. From your right: Nick Johnston, Bloomberg News immigration reporter; Michelle Mittelstadt, Dallas Morning News justice and homeland security reporter; Bill Gibson, South Florida Sun-Sentinel Washington bureau chief; Karina Hurley, Hispanic Communications Network senior producer; Keith Epstein -- I like your name, by the way -- Media General Tampa Tribune reporter; Randel Johnson, vice president of labor, immigration and employee benefits, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and a guest of our speaker; John Hughes, Bloomberg News and chair of the Speakers Committee; skipping our speaker, Ron Baygents, Kuwait News Agency Washington correspondent, and former chair of our Newsmaker Committee; Michael Barrera, president, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Bridget Laingmaid (sp), Cox broadcast reporter; Anita Kumar, St. Petersburg Times staff writer; Jennifer Dlouhy, Hearst Newspapers, Washington bureau reporter; and Charles Ericksen, editor and publisher, Hispanic Link. (Applause.)

At age 15, taunted in communist Cuba for wearing a cross around his neck, Mel Martinez joined an exodus to Florida, never knowing if he would see his parents again. He settled in with an Orlando family, and his brothers soon followed. Four years later, his parents and sister were able to join him. He graduated from college and went on to law school, became a successful trial lawyer, and was elected chairman of the Orange County government, which includes Orlando before becoming secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush. In 2004, he made a primetime speech at the Republican National Convention in New York. That fall he was elected to the U.S. Senate from Florida. In other words, he is the living embodiment of the American dream.

As an immigrant, Senator Martinez is playing a major role in the development of immigration legislation on Capitol Hill. Yesterday, Senate Republicans and Democrats agreed on the

procedure of governing debate on the legislation which would create up to 400,000 guest worker visas for unskilled workers and let many of the 11 million undocumented immigrants get on a path to legal status. Any Senate bill will have to be reconciled with legislation written by the House. House Republicans have written legislation that opponents say would criminalize the undocumented workers as well as their families and employers. The House legislation also provides for the building of 700 miles of fencing along the Mexican border. It does not have any provisions for allowing those already in the United States to legally remain. The House passed its bill in December. Senator Martinez said elements of the House bill are, quote, "disgraceful."

This is not Senator Martinez's first foray into controversial issues. He was the Republican point man when congressional Republicans intervened in the dispute over Terri Schiavo's right to die. It was Martinez's legal counsel who wrote a memo citing the political advantage to Republicans if they intervened in the case.

And last year, he called on President Bush to close Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba, calling it, quote, "An icon for bad news."

We're anxious to hear from a senator who will play a major role in crafting a major piece of legislation.

Let's welcome Senator Martinez to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

SEN. MARTINEZ: Keith, muchas gracias -- (speaking in Spanish). Actually, I said, "Thank you, Keith, for the nice introduction. It's great to be with you in the Press Club." But if I had been talking with you on February the 6th of 1962 when, as a 15-year-old I arrived in this country, that would have been the only language I could have spoken to you in.

I am someone who, as an immigrant to this nation, can tell you the journey of an immigrant in a way that I think is probably unique, certainly unique to any other senator.

And so I thought today I'd begin my talk by telling you just a little bit about how it happened in my life that I became an American. And it doesn't happen on the day that you arrive here, but it happens as you evolve and live in this land of opportunity and this land that has known over its history of over 200 years to welcome those who choose to come, sometimes, like I did, to seek freedom, to run away from a despot; others only to seek economic opportunity, but all in search of a better life.

And that is the kind of America that we have been for over 20 years. It is the America that is best represented and symbolized by that wonderful symbol of America, the Statue of Liberty.

So I came here as a youngster. I was alone. I immediately was loved and welcomed by a foster family that took me in, not immediately, but after about four months of bouncing around a couple of refugee camps for children from Cuba. And this wonderful family, who not only opened their home but opened their hearts to me, are close to me to this day. And they began to introduce me to America. And then I not too long after that went to school and went through the usual adjustments of anyone going to a new and strange school, but with an additional burden -- I

didn't speak the language. No bilingual classes in those days. I just was in the old sink-or-swim program. I swam, after sinking a little for the first few months.

Participating in sports became a huge part of how I became an American, for me. I could hit a baseball. I was the tallest Cuban most people ever saw and I could play basketball, and so I became friends with those that were participating in sports, and that was my link. That was my connector. See, that one not only taught me English -- and the first English I learned were not the words I would use here today, but -- you know. (Laughter.) They wouldn't always tell me what they were teaching me, but they were good-humored about it.

I quickly learned the phrase -- I would come home and I'd be a little upset about what happened in school that day, and my foster mother, Mrs. Young, would say, "Dear, they're not laughing at you, they're laughing with you." I never understood the difference, but it always felt like they were laughing at me when I would say something wrong in the language, or some other inappropriate cultural mistake. But at the end of all of that, in not too long a time, I began to think of myself as an American.

I remember when I began to dream in English. I began to be a part of this wonderful enterprise.

I remember watching on a black-and-white TV the Republican and Democratic conventions in 1964 and trying to understand this system of government and what went on in that. Little did I know that in this land of opportunity, as Keith just told you, I would have had the opportunity one day to stand on that big old podium in Madison Square Garden and speak to the world about my views of the presidential race and the Republican platform for this last election cycle.

Much less would I have ever dreamed of many of the things that have transpired in my life. You know, four years into this journey, my parents finally were able to leave Cuba and come here. One of the proudest times of my life was when I was -- you know, worrying and worrying about what they would do when they got here, and I was able to get my dad a -- not a job, but a pretty promising job interview, and he got that job, at a dairy farm. He was a veterinarian.

And we began our journey in America now as an immigrant family, and I did what I now see children doing for their parents, which is I translated for them. And I would go to the grocery store and show them around. I remember, when I was going off to college, showing them how to use the laundromat because, until then, they were depending on me.

And there was nice little ladies there, and they said, "Oh, gosh, you must be going off to college." And I said yes. "And they're teaching you how to wash your clothes." (Chuckling.) And I said, "Actually -- sure, whatever." (Laughter.) Too long an explanation, not enough time.

But you know, the ultimate point that I'm trying to make to you is that I think, through time, immigrants have come to this country not to change America, not to make my native language the tongue of this country; but immigrants have come to this country not to change America but to be changed by America, not to make this country something different but to make a contribution that has added to the life of this country, to the energy that this country has had over years, and to make their contribution. I hope I'm doing that.

My desire for public service is rooted in the desire to give back, to try to somehow make a contribution to a place that has done so much for me and that I believe still stands as a unique place in the world, as Ronald Reagan's "shining city on a hill."

So as we enter this immigration debate, I think it's really important that we set the right backdrop for it, that we talk about it in a way that allows us to lift ourselves to a higher purpose that this country has played in the history of mankind. It's about the unique role that America plays in the world today, about why it is that so many people want to come here.

One of the geniuses of America is that we have had, through time, the ability, the way of melding people into this melting pot that we call it.

You know, when I traveled recently in Spain, I was being asked -- because, you know, people marvel at the fact that I've had the opportunity to serve in the Cabinet of a president, the first Cuban- American to do so, and that I have the opportunity now to serve in the United States Senate. And they just somehow don't quite get it. They -- what is this?

And so I was being asked. They said, "How is it that America somehow melds their immigrants into being part of America, like you do? We can't do that. We don't seem to be able to do that here in Spain" -- or really in Europe, generally. And the different is that in this country, there's only one thing I'm limited from doing, and that is running for president, because I wasn't born here. But other than that, you know, there's not another star I cannot reach for. There's not another star that I cannot reach for, if I only dream big enough. And frankly -- I'll be quite honest with you -- I have gone well beyond where my dreams might have taken me.

And so this is what this land of opportunity means to me and what it -- and why I thought it was so important to get involved in the immigration debate, why I thought it was so important, because we want to continue to be that place where people become Americans, as part of being in America.

And so to deny people opportunities, to create a separate group of people -- I think all we're doing then is changing America and not allowing them to be changed by America.

This is a difficult debate. Nothing easy about it. It's tearing this country into different directions. A lot of emotion.

But one thing I will tell you that I find when I speak to people is that when you explain the magnitude of the problem and the fact that this is not easy and the fact that it's that we may not have perfect answers for it, but that we have to search deep within ourselves to come up with a path forward, something that's going to allow us to take care of what has been 20 years of neglect -- since 1986 until now, we have a broken-down illegal immigration system, a system that has allowed people to come here illegally, by a government looking the other way, by employers hiring people illegally and by immigrants who have violated the law by coming here illegally as well.

And how do we bring that broken down system back into some semblance of order? How do we bring back into a legal system?

Well, I'm happy to tell you that part of that is the Martinez- Hagel compromise or the Hagel- Martinez compromise in the Senate, and after much discussion and contention, now we have a unanimous consent agreement to move forward to this legislation on Monday. Timely that I'm here to talk with you about it today. You know this thing got sidetracked by politics for a little bit, it got sidetracked by people wondering what the best thing to do would be, but at this moment in time, comprehensive immigration reform comes to the U.S. Senate on Monday.

There are going to be multiple amendments. We didn't reach a specific agreement on the number of amendments, but I think there's an understanding that there would be probably 20 on the Republican side and probably 10 on the Democrat side; if there's one or two more, we'll deal with it. But we're moving forward, and there are going to be plenty of time for folks to debate their points of view. This is really important.

And one of the things that we and the Republican Caucus did strongly for, even those of us who were for comprehensive reform, is that those who have different ideas should be given the chance to fully debate it. They should be given a chance to completely air their views, and then, we can all move forward.

So nothing much has changed in spite of the rallies and all of that, and here we go forward. And so comprehensive reform means to me: border security; it means strong enforcement at the border, but it also means interior security; it also mean realistic guest worker solutions that in a way help us to secure the border. Because if we do not deal with finding a vehicle for this thriving and strong economy that has jobs that need filling, and then there are those who have great and strong desire for work, if we don't find a way to match them up, they'll find a way to do it illegally. So we need to provide a legal means for which this can take place.

And then, we need to also have strong employer enforcement. We have to give them the tools to do it, but we need to do that.

And I'll tell you something else that I insisted on having in this bill, and I think it's very important: increasing penalties for human trafficking. For those who seek to make money out of trafficking with people, not always taking care of them, they need to pay a high penalty. They need to be paying the same price as those that are smuggling drugs into our country. (Scattered applause.) Thank you.

We've had too many instances in Florida where there have been speedboats bringing desperate people from Cuba into Florida's coast with an overloaded boat in bad weather conditions, and it ends up with a loss of life. I know it happens in the desert. That needs to end.

And then, I hope that as we do this, we do it consistent with American values. I want the symbol of America to continue to be the Statue of Liberty, not a big old fence in the U.S.-Mexico border. We have to do what we can to secure the border, but that's not the kind of symbol of the America I've known, that we want to have for the world.

So first and foremost, we have to secure the border, and in the post-9/11 world, this is essential. We have to know who's coming and going. I'm encouraging that the president will be speaking to this on Monday. I think it's great that he's going to set out a -- his ideas on how the border needs to be secured. It's been one of the -- one of the problems in this debate has been that there has been a lack of credibility about strong border security by many. And so I think as we go forward, it's very important that there be a seriousness of purpose, and that if we can, with credibility, tell the people of America we're going to secure the border.

We're going to add Border Patrol agents. We're going to add immigration enforcement investigators, immigration inspectors, Customs inspectors. We're going to authorize the Department of Homeland Security to make whatever improvements they need on the border in terms of the checkpoints, in terms of the virtual fencing, the kind of stuff that may in this day and time allow us to have surveillance over the border and be able to react appropriately, and whatever other ideas we might hear next week from the president. And I think the bottom line is we're going to secure the border.

But that's not enough, and that's not good enough. There's a second step we have to take. We have to have a fraud-resistant card for employers that are going to be held accountable for who they hire so that this tamperproof card can be an identification that we give workers. So that will provide verification of who the people are that is here. And we also need to deal with the fact that employers are going to have a burden to ensure that this happens.

And then what do we do with this 11, 12 million -- we don't even know how many exactly that are here in this country -- well, we need to deal with them in three categories. That's Martinez -- or Hagel- Martinez.

The first one is that those that are recent arrivals -- here less than two years -- they would be required to leave the country. They don't really get a benefit or an opportunity. Those seeking to return would have to wait in line on the other side of the border and apply for a new worker visa program if they qualified for it.

The second group that have been here more than two years but less than five -- that group will have a path, will have an opportunity, but they need to re-enter the country legally. This is part of a compromise. Somebody asked me what made it such a good idea, and I said it gets the votes. It's pragmatic. It's a way of dealing with those that are so concerned about those who came illegally re-entering the country. So we take that group of next most recent and make them re-enter the country legally. But then they have an opportunity, after being fingerprinted and having their background checked and so forth, to re-enter, and then they'll be subject to the same rules as temporary workers. And they will have a path where they can apply for a green card. They can normalize their status here. They can also do that after they meet all of the requirements that we've set out, which is paying fines, which is going to the back of the line for the green card until the backlog is -- those who have been here legally go first, let's put it that way. Their backgrounds will be checked. They'll have to undertake -- undergo English classes and civics classes. They have to show a willingness to be here and they'll pay fines.

That's not what I would call amnesty, that's what I would call a path to citizenship, earned citizenship.

The third group are those who have been here more than five years, typically more established, many of them with families, many of them owning a home. That was part of the American dream I used to peddle the last time I was at this podium, as HUD secretary, people's ownership of homes. Many of these people are illegal that own homes in America today. And so we would allow them to remain here, continue to work, be legalized in their status, but they would also have to pay fines, they would also have to have background checks, criminal background checks, and they would also have to go to the back of the line. And the path to citizenship would be a long one. It could be as much as 11 years before they could be in that situation.

There's something I -- people have been sending me things about this debate. Some have sent me bricks to build a fence with -- (laughs/laughter) -- others have sent me love notes telling me where I should go and live and things like that -- (laughs/laughter) -- but others have sent me more interesting things. I had a quote from Theodore Roosevelt that I thought was really interesting. Old Teddy Roosevelt was never a shy fellow about his opinions.

And he said, back in his day, "Any man who says he's an American but something else also isn't an American at all. We have room but for one flag, the American flag, we have room but for one language, the English language, and we have room but for one sole loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people." And I believe that's even true today. You know? I mean, I hope people respect the fact that I might speak in Spanish, but I don't pretend that that should be the language of this country. You know, I still am very proud of my Cuban roots. I was delighted this week to see a fabulous movie about the Cuban experience, called "The Lost City," by Andy Garcia.

I'm very proud of my heritage and who I am, just like an Italian American or an Irish American. There's nothing that threatens our freedom or threatens our country or our way of life, because on March the 17th, even us Cubans wear a green tie. My wife, Kitty, always thinks it's a little funny, but I do that. (Laughter.) But, you know, I mean, I've been told that on St. Patrick's Day, everybody's Irish. That doesn't threaten our country. We have a Columbus Day parade in New York and many other parts of this country. That's the blending of America.

And you know, there's more tacos and enchiladas in our diet today than there used to be, and there's also pizza. And so all immigrant groups make a contribution to the culture and to the richness of this country, and we shouldn't seek to stop that. We should seek to remain American, to remain part of what this country is, which is so unique and so special, but to also understand that there are people who have come here through the history of this country that have come from other places, and they remain with a love and an attachment to that which they left behind, but fully cognizant that they've now made that commitment, they've made that transfer. And if we welcome them, if we give them the opportunity to be one of the many, "E pluribus unum," then we will continue this American experiment on into the future and it will be a successful one, just like it has been in the past.

I as an American don't feel threatened by those 10 (million) or 11 million people having an opportunity to live in the land of opportunity, to have an opportunity to live the American dream



as I have been able to live it and as so many others who have come before me, long before me, back in the days of Teddy Roosevelt when we were being told that Italians would never be real Americans because they were too different from Northern Europeans, who had been the predominant immigrants to this country in other times. The fact is, America has known how to deal with that.

And I hope I'll be equally as lucky in dealing with your questions now. So thank you for having me. (Applause.)

MR. HILL: Ready for the questions?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Go at it.

MR. HILL: Okay, fasten the seatbelt.

SEN. MARTINEZ: All right. And by the way, I'm --

MR. HILL: I know --

SEN. MARTINEZ: Okay. I didn't do it badly. Kept it on time.

MR. HILL: Right on time.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Yeah, all right.

MR. HILL: First question. Do you think President Bush would sign an immigration bill that's focused only on enforcement?

SEN. MARTINEZ: He's been very clear that his belief is that we have to have a comprehensive bill and that the American people, that this nation needs a comprehensive reform bill. He was very clear on that in the meeting that we had at the White House a couple of weeks ago with the leadership of both parties in the Senate, and a few others of us who straggle along that are not leaders. But the fact is that I think he's been very clear on that. And I don't know that he would veto it. He'd have to tell you what he would do with the bill. But I know that's not what he wants.

MR. HILL: Would it be better to have no final legislation than one that focuses only on enforcement?

SEN. MARTINEZ: No, I think -- I mean look, I think we need to have enforcement of the border. Now, my hope is -- and I'm an optimist -- is that we need to have a comprehensive bill, that we have to have a bill that does it all, that that's what America needs. It's too important for us to just do half the battle.

And you know, by the way, I want to tell you, for those who believe that only border enforcement is what we should do, they are de facto granting amnesty to 12 million people. They're not for amnesty, but they in fact are de facto granting amnesty to 12 million people. And

I believe that it's a mistake. I think we need to know who those people are. We need to bring them out of the shadows for all the good and lofty reasons I stated, but also because of national security implications -- we need to know who these people are, where they work, what they do, who are they. And so the only way to do that is through bringing them out, offering them an opportunity to come out of the shadows and be a part of this experiment, but also for us to know who they are and where they live.

MR. HILL: Has President Bush done enough to sell the nation on the need for comprehensive immigration reform?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I'll say he's been the first and strongest voice on this issue way back when, before it was cool. And so I give him great credit for that. But I also think he's going to make a very important contribution to this debate as he speaks next week on the issue. I hope he'll speak about strong border enforcement.

I think the president probably misplaced what the American people needed to hear. He needed to have spoken first about border enforcement; he spoke about a guest worker program. He got one step ahead. And I think that now he needs to reassert that leadership that he is for strong border enforcement, but that he's also for a broader, comprehensive reform.

MR. HILL: Speaking of President Bush speaking next week, what would you want President Bush to say Monday and in future speeches about your immigration legislation?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I'm thinking -- well, more to it? Is it --

MR. HILL: (Off mike.)

SEN. MARTINEZ: All right. All right.

MR. HILL: Can you do comprehensive immigration reform without Bush's -- the president's active involvement?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I think the president has been clear in his message. I think what I'd like to see him say on Monday is, "Here are 10 steps I'm going to take to secure this border, and I'm doing it now." I think that would be very helpful.

I would hope he also would restate his commitment and his reasoning why he thinks that border - - I mean, that border enforcement alone is not the answer and that we do need to have a comprehensive reform.

What was the other part of the question? I'm sorry.

MR. HILL: Can you do comprehensive immigration reform without the president's active involvement?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Oh, and I believe that if we are lucky enough and skillful enough, I should say, to get a bill out of the Senate before Memorial Day -- and I think right now we're poised to do that -- I think the president will be very effective and very engaged and will be very necessary in order to assist us in getting a compromise with the House.

MR. HILL: Do you anticipate your version of the legislation becoming law?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Of course. (Laughter.)

MR. HILL: Okay! All righty. (Laughter, applause.) Short and sweet. Thank you very much.

SEN. MARTINEZ: (Chuckling.) All right.

MR. HILL: Certain members have advocated for deporting the estimated 12 million illegals in this country. Is this even logistically possible or just hurtful rhetoric?

SEN. MARTINEZ: There's some who would deport me for the positions I've taken on this immigration bill. But no, I think -- look, I think it's impractical. I think it's wrong-headed. I understand how some people feel that the illegality involved in people coming -- I know how some people perhaps just are not comfortable with too many people of another land.

I mean, I know there's a rally going on downtown. I'm hearing somebody saying Mexico is going to occupy us. Come on! Have more confidence in America than that. We are a very strong, diverse country with a lot of richness about our culture and who we are.

And so I believe that massive deportations -- how do you carry it out? I mean, do you send people with trucks to round people up and run them to the border? I mean, 11 (million), 12 million people? That just -- you can't do it. It's not realistic.

And you know, I would say, at the end of day, the problems in trying to enforce that would be overwhelming. So --

MR. HILL: I'll step to the mike.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Okay. All righty.

MR. HILL: This individual is a native Miamian who moved to D.C. last year. And she says -- but -- well, this person says, "By the time I left my hometown, most every level of elected officials representing Coral Gables was Cuban-American. The diversity I cherished in South Florida was no longer. Do you consider Miami a model melting pot?"

SEN. MARTINEZ: No, Miami is not a model melting pot, because Miami is a city that has a large majority of Hispanics. I mean, San Antonio is not a melting pot. I mean, it is a melting pot in the sense that the people who are there have become Americans and are part of the American experiment. It's not in the melting pot in the sense of your question, which is perhaps you would

have been more comfortable if we'd have had a precise percentage of those elected to office that represented the different, you know, ethnic orientation of everyone there.

But what I think we mean by a melting point is a country where people come here and become Americans, and those people in Coral Gables government today, I would say, are a part of a melting point.

I guess what I should have said in the beginning is, no, Miami's not a typical American city. Miami's not a typical American city. Orlando may be closer to the mark. Although, Florida is not a typical American state. But, you know, what is America? And when do you become a typical American city? Florida's often thought of as a microcosm of the country. We do seem to be a bellwether for many things, including elections, and maybe that is the America that we are today. It's different, it is not the same, and it's certainly not monolithic, and it's not the America -- you know, Orlando of today, Orlando, Florida, my little hometown, is not the place it was in 1962. Disney came; the world changed.

There is change always in all that we do, and I think that what you should hope is not be concerned about the ethnicity of the elected officials in Coral Gables, but whether they're serving the public interest in a good and positive way, and whether your democracy allows you an opportunity to run for office yourself and be elected as the majority would elect you.

MR. HILL: Do you agree with the Minutemen? Where do you disagree with them?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I would say that I know there's, I'm sure, well-intended Americans who are part of that movement. I understand the frustrations of many who live by the border who have seen the lack of order, the lack of law enforcement along the border and have taken actions into their own hands. I would say that I think they've always conducted themselves, from what I've seen, and there have never been any press reports that they've done anything other than comport themselves in an appropriate way, I mean, in terms of what they do. They bring water to people that are in the desert dying. They are there to alert law enforcement. I don't have a problem with that. I mean, I'm not ready to join the minutemen, and perhaps some of their views are not compatible with mine. But they're Americans, and they're -- as long as they do it in a law-abiding way and in cooperation with law enforcement, God bless them. I don't have a problem with them.

MR. HILL: How should America balance the need for bilingualism with the need for immigrants to learn English? What is the right balance?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I lean way on the side of English in the balance, okay, because I wanted to be a trial lawyer. In my life, I wanted to be a lawyer that could go in the court room, and I wasn't going to be successful at that if I had a fake accent. Like it or not, that's life. If I had decided I wanted to be a TV broadcaster, I might have better figured out Walter Cronkite's accent and mimic it, because that's just the way it is.

So I believe that while there should be an opportunity for those who come to perhaps have a tad of help along the way, not totally the sink-and-swim that I was involved in, I think it's terribly

important that young people in our schools become a part of our culture, and you don't become a part of the American culture when you're segregated into an isolated classroom with only people like you. Or, frankly, in Florida it would be Haitians, it would be Cubans, it would be Salvadorans and Dominicans and, you know, the melting pot of Latin America, as well as elsewhere, not always even speaking the same language.

I was at the graduation of Miami Dade Community College -- back to our Coral Gables person -- and there were 81 flags in the auditorium representing the 81 countries represented by the graduating class. You know, this is America.

And so I really believe that to be successful in this country you've got to learn the language of the majority. You've got to learn English. You've got to be a part of it. And I just think that -- you know, what I found in my own life was that my accent was a distraction to others, and rather than paying attention to what I was saying, they would immediately say, "Where you from?" And I knew immediately that they had gone right past whatever I was saying that I thought was important, because I was saying it, and they were just wanting to know where I was from because the accent captured them. And, you know, at some point girls began to say, "Gosh, you've lost your cute accent." (Laughter.) Well, that also is part of becoming an American, I suppose!

MR. HILL: What about the many, many immigrants less fortunate than you, how can we help them, or should we?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I think in the land of opportunity what you do is give people opportunity. You give people a chance, you give people an opening, you give them education. To me, that's the great unifier, the great equalizer. You know, I am one of those that -- I know how unpopular the Dream Act is with many. But how could I -- what a hypocrite I would be -- I came here legally, so I'm in a little different category. But, you know, I struggled mightily to get myself through college. I had to put myself right on through because not only that, but I was in the midst of college when my parents came. And so the \$300 I had in a savings account I turned over to my dad and we spent a couple hundred of that on a used car so he could get himself to work. And then I moved on, and I went to college not seeking or getting help from them, but sometimes helping them. So, out of that educational experience, wondering as the semester was drawing to a close and tuition for the next one was coming along, how in the world I would pay it, and what in the world I was going to do. Somehow it all worked out.

But I just believe that to put an impediment on those that are here, at times for many, many years, in their quest for higher education, is not penalizing an illegal immigrant. It's penalizing America because they're not going anywhere, you know? We're not deporting these people. They're going to be part of our great melting pot. And so what we have to do is find ways in which we can educate more of our people. So how will we help them? Help them get an education. That's the greatest and best thing that anyone did for me, is help me get an education. And many unsung heroes in that story in my life, but the fact is is that that is what makes all the difference.

And in the 21st century, if we relegate people to an uneducated class, we'll relegate them to third-class citizenship, and they will not be a part of the opportunities that this world in which we live in a globalized economy depends upon.

MR. HILL: Where do the Cubans in Miami stand on the immigration debate?

SEN. MARTINEZ: You know, I don't know. I don't know that I should speak for anyone but myself. I've had a lot of very positive comments from a lot of Cuban-Americans about my involvement in it. And I think they're proud of the fact that I'm showing leadership on an issue. It tangentially involves Cuban-Americans because we're part of what's called the Cuban Adjustment Act, which came into being some years ago, and it basically helps Cubans who arrive in the United States, because of the political conditions in Cuba, to remain here. And so we do not have the same problems as Cuban-Americans than -- or as Cuban migrants than other nationalities do.

And so I don't think it's as passionate an issue. But I've been very pleased and very surprised by the many supportive comments that I've had from my Cuban-American constituents, particularly in South Florida. So I take it from that they're positive on what I'm doing.

MR. HILL: How have the marches and/or the economic boycotts affected the immigration debate?

SEN. MARTINEZ: It wasn't helpful. You know, I think it was important initially that there was this great outpouring of people. But I think, particularly the last one and the boycott, were very, very destructive. They weren't constructive. They weren't helpful.

They were hardening people's views. Anytime in one of these marches in which I saw a Mexican flag -- and I have great respect for Mexico. I mean, look, I, you know, still have a Cuban flag in some closet at home, and if ever Castro meets his logical, biological end, I'd probably bring it out and wave it on that day. But the fact of the matter is is that I believe that those who are seeking to persuade American lawmakers, and those who are seeking to say, "I want to be here, and I want to be part of this country. Help me be legal" -- it would dawn on you, you would think, that waving the American flag would be more positive than waving the flag of any other country.

And so I thought it was a dreadful mistake, and I don't think it advanced the cause. And I also wondered if it wasn't led by some who had other political agendas. But be it as it may, I would hope we can just now have the debate where it's going to be resolved, which is going to be in the halls of Congress, and where we're going to -- where we have the responsibility to resolve it.

Having said all of that, please know I believe in people's freedom of expression. I wish the people in my native Cuba could have it. I believe in people's right to march. And so I'm not against that. I think boycotts are very negative and very counterproductive. So I don't chide anyone for marching or speaking their piece. I'm just telling you that as a political measure of pulse, it wasn't helpful.

MR. HILL: As you notice, most of these questions are about the immigration debate. That's why --

SEN. MARTINEZ: I know, yeah. Have you got any others?

MR. HILL: Oh, we got quite a few.

SEN. MARTINEZ: All right.

MR. HILL: Scores of conservatives in the House have vowed to vote against anything that smacks of, quote, "amnesty." Even if you get your legislation through the Senate relatively unchanged, how do you get it past the formidable coalition in the House?

SEN. MARTINEZ: "No entiende la pregunta." (Laughter.)

MR. HILL: Translation, please.

SEN. MARTINEZ: I didn't understand that question. (Laughs.)

Actually -- no, look, I don't know how it's going to work out. I am not one who is experienced enough in the ways of the Congress to know precisely how that might evolve. I think a lot of presidential leadership will be necessary. I also believe that Speaker Hastert, who has spoken in more conciliatory tones, hopefully will have his tone heard.

I'm encouraged also by the words from other members of the House from Florida that I've heard from, that have encouraged me, that have told me that they really think that, aside from a core who is in a decided minority, that there are a lot of people in the House who view this issue differently. I've had members of the House tell me that they voted for the bill which contained the criminalization aspects of it but they didn't agree with it. And many of them, 160 Republicans, voted to take it out of the bill, which at that time got caught up in politics and the Democrats wanted to make sure it stayed in the bill. Made good copy. You know? Makes us look stereotypically whatever.

The point is that I think that until we have a bill for them to consider, rhetoric is whatever rhetoric is. I think once we have a product -- hopefully, by Memorial Day -- out of the Senate, it will get everybody more serious to say, okay, we have a responsibility to this nation; how are we going to address this issue and make progress? And they're going to have a president of their own party who's going to be telling them, move forward in a way that is constructive, that is comprehensive and that is what America needs.

I was encouraged, by the way, from a poll that I saw today. Sixty-one percent of Americans, even at this stage of the debate, even after the demonstrations, believe that rather than deportation, a path to citizenship, a path to normalizing people's status here is what they favor. I was encouraged by that, and I think that -- I'm an optimist. You're not going to get me to say we can't get it done. And I just hope that we don't let the election calendar rule the day. So I'm encouraged. I think we need to do this.

You know, we don't come to Washington just to be here, just to occupy a seat and make sure that we do what we need to do to get to the next election. I hope we come to Washington to make a difference, to make the tough decisions for this nation, for the good of the country, for the future. And so that's my hope and my dream.

MR. HILL: I'm going to combine two questions here. Do you think the bridge between the House and Senate can be bridged in conference? And what is the likelihood that the conferees will work out the different approaches to immigration?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, again, you know, I've not been on a conference yet. I might be on this one. It would be interesting to be. I'd love a chance to do that. I don't know what the leaders will decide on who the conferees will be. So I'm not a real good one to understand the pulse of how this happens. But I know that there have been many times in the history of this Congress where both houses have come out with very different products, and somehow or another they end up working it out and there is a bill and it gets signed by the president on a fair day in the East Room. And I'm convinced that we're going to manage to do that.

And I think part of what it's going to take is for the president to establish credibility with the country that the border is going to be secure.

I think those members of the House that could say, okay, now I get it, we are securing the border; I can look beyond security to the border. Part of the problem is that if they didn't feel confidence in the border security issue, that they believed that there'd be thousands and millions of people who would be coming across the border to beat the deadline, if you will. And so they want to ensure that the border is secure. And I think we'll do a great deal by doing all that we can through the Department of Homeland Security and through other means necessary and available, that the president will do whatever it takes to make sure that he can give the people of this country that sense of understanding that, yes, the border is going to be secure; now let's move on and deal with this problem comprehensively and fully.

MR. HILL: Wouldn't the compromise legislation you're working on still separate some families, as you were in your own youth?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, inevitably, when you're dealing with millions of people, there are going to be circumstances that are not going to be what you would hope if you were dealing with them individually.

I know the difficulty of family separation, the pain that it brings. It sears my soul to this day to think about those -- well, first of all, about my parents and the incredible decision they made to send me alone, and the love that they had for me and the trust that they had in this country, and in my instance in the Catholic Church, who was involved in taking care of me, and also the desperation they felt about the circumstances I was in.

So lots of people around the world for many reasons -- and by the way, not all immigrants are Latin Americans. Many of them are here from Eastern Europe, from Ireland.



And so, you know, as we go forward in this discussion, there are going to be inequities that arise in any one instance, in any one given point in time. What we have to do is find a way that we can get a solution to a majority of the problem -- to the vast majority of the problem and then, obviously, in a humane way try to deal with those inequities that will arise, undoubtedly.

MR. HILL: With immigration being one of the most important topics for Hispanic media organizations right now, there's a lot of confusion regarding the terms that should be used to refer to undocumented workers. Do you personally find the term "illegal" and "illegal alien" offensive?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I think that undocumented workers is the way I refer to it, is somewhat of a neutral term. Those that are here illegally obviously are illegal aliens.

The word "alien" I always found interesting because I was called an alien and I had an alien card, and I had to go register every year in January at the post office because I was an alien.

And about that time, Star Trek was popular on TV -- (laughter) -- and you know, it would cause me to wonder just what that really meant.

So anyway, no, I think undocumented workers is the preferred way that I would seek to call people that are here undocumented, who cross the border without documents, who did the same thing that those on the Mayflower did when they came. They just landed here.

MR. HILL: Are there aspects of the immigration legislation that affect non-Latinos? All the focus is on the Mexican border issues. What about everybody else?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I'm very focused on Florida's border. You know, we have over a thousand miles of water that is our border, and I believe it's very important that in addition to whatever we do on the border between the United States and Mexico, that we pay attention to increasing the funding for the Coast Guard so that they can do their job in the Florida Straits and in the Gulf of Mexico. And I think that, frankly, as a matter of national security, much beyond immigration, that is very important for us to do. And obviously, the Canadian border needs to be addressed as well. I mean, I would think that if we do strong border security in the Mexican border, and I'm a bad guy and I'm trying to get into the country here, that I'll either take a fast boat from Cuba, where we don't trust the person that's in charge there, or maybe go to Canada and then come across that border. And so it's going to be essential that all of our borders be secure and that we invest the necessary resources.

While I'm on that subject, it's going to be very, very important that we also appropriate the funds necessary to implement this plan. If we pass immigration reform law, but we don't provide the money to the Department of Homeland Security to do all that it take to implement all of these wonderful ideas, we're going to be right back into an illegal system before we know it. So for those who are concerned about the current system, we should take a lesson from it and properly fund the implementation of these agreements, whether it's how we protect the borders or how we do the mechanism to allow people that are here illegally to be processed and to deal with those

who will come illegally, so that we can do it in a way that is efficient and effective and continues to provide the credibility that we need on this issue.

MR. HILL: Do you expect President Bush to unveil new border security measures on Monday or just restate what the administration has already doing?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I would hope that he would unveil specific measures, but I am not privy -- I'm no longer in his Cabinet, so I don't get the talking points from the White House anymore. And so, no, I don't know what he's going to say on Monday, but I do hope -- I do fervently hope that it will be strong and new ideas and not just a rehashing of the past. And I have a feeling that's what he's going to do because I think that is what the moment calls for, and so I hope he will.

MR. HILL: No one really knows how long immigrants have been here. How can you base legislation on that?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, what we're going to have to do is devise a system -- and the legislation provides ideas, although the regulators will have to ultimately do the regulations to implement them -- but the idea is that we will have verification. It will not be self-executing. You can't just walk in and say, "I've been here five years." You'll have to have third-party verification, and you'll have to have document verification. And the burden of proof will be on the one -- on the person seeking to establish their status and the time they've been here. And I think we can do that. It'll be costly, and it'll be cumbersome, by the way. That's part of what I'm saying. We have to implement this system to -- in order to be able to do this, and do it right.

MR. HILL: The legislation requires that a huge new database be created on all workers and be checked by employers. Can the government do it accurately and quickly?

SEN. MARTINEZ: (Chuckles.) It's part of the challenge. We'll have to get it done. Employers -- if the employers are going to be able to verify employees, they're going to have to be able to go to database and get it done. And if we're going to implement a new security ID that is tamper-proof and all of that, I think all of this is going to have to work together. So there's some tough implementation issues.

By the way, I know I'm getting close to the end, because I'm going to have to catch a plane to go back to Florida. And I want to just thank some of my HUD alumni that are here today, that came to be with me. I appreciate you all coming and thank you for being here. And we appreciate you, appreciate all the work you did at HUD. We did a lot of good. And I'm glad to see so many successful careers continuing to bloom in other arenas.

MR. HILL: Guess what. We're going to switch gears.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Okay.

MR. HILL: No more immigration legislation questions.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Okay.

MR. HILL: All right. In the plea agreement with former congressional aide Neil Volz, prosecutors said that a U.S. representative met with you to discuss his interest in securing funding for Indian housing, especially for clients of lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Did this meeting have any impact on how you awarded housing grants? And were you asked at any time to make sure that Abramoff's tribal clients received federal funds?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I have no recollection of the meeting. I assure you that we did not do anything special or specific as a result of any requests like that, and I think that my HUD folks here today -- interesting that that should come up.

You know, I don't have any recollection of any specific request or any specific event. And I guarantee you we didn't take any specific action as a result of any requests such as that.

But for someone to come and see the secretary of HUD with a request that we do something about housing for some group, that happened daily at HUD. So it would be very difficult to remember any specific meeting like that.

MR. HILL: Okay. A couple questions focusing on your home state.

SEN. MARTINEZ: We've got to go soon.

MR. HILL: Hm?

SEN. MARTINEZ: We've got to go soon.

MR. HILL: Okay. We will get you out. Don't worry.

SEN. MARTINEZ: (Chuckles.) Okay. Good. Thank you.

MR. HILL: In hindsight, do you view your intervention -- how do you view your -- the intervention you advocated in the Schiavo case?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, I've, hopefully, said all I'm going to say on this. And I'm going to try my best for my Florida scribes that are here today, to repeat it exactly as I said it before so as to not say anything new or different. But I had the impression -- well, that case presented some very unique circumstances. However, as a general matter, I did say that I thought these are issues relating to end-of-life decisions and these kinds of things that are usually in the probate courts and state courts, and that are issues for the states more appropriately than the federal government. And the only other thing I meant to say was that the Schiavo case presented unique circumstances. But that's really all I will say about it.

MR. HILL: The Senate campaign of Representative Katherine Harris is getting a lot of attention. Governor Bush has said she can't win. What are your thoughts on the race? Can anyone jump in and give the Republicans the edge?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, first of all, I don't think he meant it today. That was a week or so ago when he said that, and he doesn't mean it any longer, I'm sure -- I think that's what he said.

So -- but anyway. No, look, Katherine Harris is in a difficult race. Any time you run against an incumbent it's difficult. A number of people have filed today. I think she's by far the most serious of those candidates and I think she'll be the nominee. And I wish her well. And I think that the best thing she can do is to focus her race on the issues and her opponent and their differences and why she would be a great senator for the state of Florida and this country. And I wish her well. And I'll be endorsing her, if I haven't already done so. I think I already have. But I'll be, I'm sure, campaigning with her.

MR. HILL: Okay. Should Jeb Bush run for president? Should he have run for the Senate?

SEN. MARTINEZ: I tried to talk him into it on more than one occasion, but he didn't show the least bit of interest. And so, anyway. But I think Jeb Bush has been a superlative governor for Florida. I think he's been a tremendous governor, and by any measure, I think one of the greatest governors our state has had in recent years, in recent memory, in my memory. He enjoys today -- with the name "Bush" -- about a 63 percent approval rating. That's pretty good, if you ask me. And he ends his term, I think, on a very high note. And I think Governor Bush is a dedicated public servant, a brilliant guy with a lot of good ideas and a lot of energy, and still only 54 years of age. So I think he's got a bright future ahead of him, if he chooses to exercise an option of running for office. He's a wonderful guy.

And I know he probably is at the moment looking forward to spending some private time, which I don't blame him for. His family sacrificed mightily for him to serve.

But I think he would have made a great senator. I think he'd make a great president. He's been a great governor. And I think he has a tremendous track record to run on if he chooses to run for anything in the future.

MR. HILL: Can you comment on the NSA situation?

SEN. MARTINEZ: Well, you know, my first take on it is that I think we continue to do great damage to our national security by leaks, and I live in a September 12th world. I was in the Cabinet at the time. I remember leaving my home on September 12th in the morning and driving past the Pentagon, which was -- black smoke billowing out of that building, and I wasn't sure if I would be during that day confronted with yet another terrorist attack. And thank goodness that because of all that we've done and all the things that have been -- the measures that have been taken by our government, we've avoided another terrorist attack.

And so I continue to believe that we are in a time of war against terrorists who are ruthless, who would harm our nation, and I just cannot for the life of me understand the continuing desire of some to leak information that is sensitive and important, legally done and legally obtained, and secondly, a great desire by some to try to find a political edge and a political angle on issues so vital to our national security.

MR. HILL: Before I ask the final question, I would like to present you with a couple of items. First, the National Press Club mug.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Thank you. I appreciate that.

MR. HILL: If you will --

SEN. MARTINEZ: I appreciate it very much.

MR. HILL: And we have a framed certificate of appreciation for your appearance here.

SEN. MARTINEZ: Thank you. I'm very proud to display that. I appreciate it. It's been great. You've been a great group to be with, and I thank you very much for giving me this really great opportunity and in such a timely manner.

MR. HILL: Your final jeopardy question. (Laughter.)

SEN. MARTINEZ: All right.

MR. HILL: Are you ready? Should the Constitution be amended to allow non-U.S. foreign Americans like yourself to become president? (Laughter.)

SEN. MARTINEZ: (Laughs.) Well, you know, I alluded to that earlier, and there's a lot of people in this town who don't know that, and so they think, "Oh, man! You're going to be on the ticket this coming time." (Laughs.) Anyway -- no, the fact is that I think it should not for me because, frankly, that's beyond my time. But in a country where we don't put any limits on people's opportunity, it's one opportunity that's foreclosed. And I would have loved to have been able to tell you earlier that there is nothing I cannot do in this country.

And so I think for the good of the nation and the fact that we have brilliant people who've served this nation in different capacities -- like a Henry Kissinger, not very electable probably, but a brilliant guy, and then others, like, you know, the governor of California and -- you know, I don't know. There's a number of figures in the current history that we could point to -- Zbigniew Brzezinski. I don't know; there's a number of them and people who through history have made great contributions. I would like to think that in the future, after a long tenure of residence, that maybe that would not be an impediment to the highest office in the land.

But again, I'm not making an announcement today, I'm just -- (laughter) -- I'm just saying about what would be good for the country going forward.

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be with you.

MR. HILL: Thank you.

SEN. MARTINEZ: I appreciate it very much. (Applause.)

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