



Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles

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"The Real Minutemen"

Remarks of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to the Anderson Forecast
Conference

University of California at Los Angeles

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

It always warms my heart to come back to my alma mater. And not just because of the pride I feel in being able to boast a small association with one of the greatest public universities in the world. But because UCLA is where my second chance in life really began. And I know that this is true for many of the young people who walk this campus every day.

The last several years have not been easy for California's colleges and universities. And it's a tragedy for our state. Chancellor Albert Carnesale deserves our thanks and respect for steering UCLA through treacherous waters and for his tireless work delivering the message that we can not afford to shortchange investments in our young people and in our future.

I want to thank the researchers and authors of the Anderson Forecast whose work helps us to see that future with such honesty and clarity.

And I want to thank all those at the Goldman Sachs Global Markets Institute, whose provocative report on the growing

economic influence of the Latino and Hispanic communities is the subject that brings us here today.

Thank you all for having me.

I have to admit that it's humbling—even a little intimidating—to appear before such a distinguished group. And, here in the presence of so much intellectual firepower, I hope that this doesn't seem like an obvious thing to say:

But I love this country.

I love this country.

Where else could someone like me, the son and grandson of immigrants, get a second chance in life and go on to become the chief executive of the second largest city of greatest nation in the world?

And what a city it is! A leading international metropolis that is positively alive with diversity and pulsating with the promise that that diversity brings. Here we are, poised at the gateway of the Pacific Rim and Latin America and the great consumer markets of North America. In a city where 120 languages are spoken. Where the changing demographic face of America is taking shape right before our eyes.

Where we truly live in a microcosm of America's biggest challenges and greatest hopes.

It's an obvious statement of fact that LA's future—and California's future—and America's future—will be written in the story of how we deal with our immigrant and underserved minority populations.

And we should have no illusions—these are complex challenges. Challenges that, in my view, are distorted in a simplistic public debate that is far too focused on a group of extremists calling

themselves Minutemen—and whose adoption of that label is an affront to all immigrants and to all Americans.

I think we should applaud President Bush for having the courage to speak out against the Minutemen.

I mean that.

And, while we're doing so, we should take a moment to remember who the real Minutemen were.

We should remember that as many as half of the men who fought in the American Revolution were Scotch-Irish immigrants. People down on their luck. Refugees in a hundred-year migration. Who first fled the poverty and political violence of the Scottish lowlands. And then, a century later, set sail from Ireland to America to escape the religious intolerance and punitive economic policies of the British crown.

We should remember that the stories of the real Minutemen tell the story of America. A story that has been affirmed and reaffirmed generation after generation. And it doesn't matter if that story began at a dockyard in Ulster or at the border crossing in San Ysidro. It is the common thread that runs through the life and lineage of every person in this room.

We all trace our roots to the same dream. We are all the offspring of men and women who traversed oceans and crossed deserts to get here. Many of whom came with little more than the shirts on their backs. Some of whom came here in chains. And they built our economy. And they worked nearly every day of their lives. And they suffered all the small insults and minor humiliations that immigrants everywhere endure.

Ladies and gentlemen, we should always remember that America was not built by people with trust funds. It was made in the toil and in the dreams of its immigrants.

Now, I know that there are some who say that this is a nice, but nostalgic view. That we live in a much different world today. That the old economic growth model of the 20th century, based on large numbers of manufacturing jobs providing opportunities for upward mobility, is no more. That the percentage of the population earning income in the manufacturing sector has dropped to just 11%. That a simple high school education isn't going to cut it in the economy of the 21st Century. That, despite this reality, minority and immigrant children are dropping out of school at alarming and unacceptable rates. And that the presence of a population without adequate education and skills places serious and unsustainable pressures on our systems of medical care and insurance.

And, you know what, people are correct to raise these questions.

The challenges are real.

We should talk about the costs of immigration. We should be serious about managing our rate of population growth. We should demand that the federal government keep its promises on border security. But while we are talking about the costs, shouldn't we also be discussing the benefits immigrants bring?

Ladies and gentlemen, I can't say it more clearly: America's future depends on its immigrants, and we will not succeed unless our immigrant and minority communities succeed.

Consider the greatest policy dilemma of our lifetimes—how to pay for the retirements and medical needs of the baby boom generation. The great unspoken truth is that we cannot face this challenge without depending heavily on the contributions of immigrants and without fully integrating our immigrant and underserved minority populations into the economy.

We can't honor our commitments to the elderly and maintain our standard of living as a nation without relying on the contributions of newcomers--and without bringing these people along into the mainstream of American life.

And that's why I think that the Global Markets Institute study is so important.

The report shows that Latino and Hispanic incomes are rising and will continue to rise at a rate faster than the population at large.

It predicts that as Latinos earn more, that they will spend more on health care and insurance and home ownership.

It advises corporate America that the companies capturing the growing Latino market will enjoy a distinct competitive advantage.

And it underscores the central challenges we face: How to improve the education we provide to immigrants and minorities. How to foster the growth of business in immigrant and underserved communities. And how to seize the opportunities presented by our diversity.

Here in LA, we are committed to facing these challenges.

We are committed to expanding opportunities for Latino and immigrant and minority kids to enter universities like UCLA—and to succeed once they get there.

To working in partnership with our leading colleges and universities in order to provide support and outreach to these communities.

To making long-needed improvements to the LA Unified School District so that more kids are qualified to enter college and are prepared for the challenge when they arrive.

To promoting the growth of LA businesses that will provide real job opportunities for our graduates.

And to fostering the idea that LA's population is a major asset than can be tapped to boost our city's role in international trade, especially with countries to our south.

We need to help build the infrastructure and relationships to facilitate natural trade relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexico... between Salvadoran-Americans and El Salvador... between LA and Brazil and Argentina and Chile...

We have a huge port that serves as a conduit for good jobs. But infrastructure investments are needed from the state.

We need to continue to fight in Sacramento and Washington, DC, to secure funds that to build trade and expand our business relationships with our neighbors.

And we need to be strategic. To identify the best sectors for growth. And to avoid competing across the globe for low wage jobs in a desperate "race to the bottom."

Most of all, we need to remember where we came from. All of us. To remember as we travel around the city, that the folks bussing tables and cleaning homes and starting small businesses in places like South Los Angeles... they're the real Minutemen.

We need to stand with them and fight with them. Because without them... we can't succeed.

Thank you for listening.

