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Questionnaire for Presidential Candidates

Governor Bill Richardson

The following four issues were a priority for a substantial majority of participants. It is essential that we hear your views on these questions.

ISSUE AREA: HEALTH CARE. Our health care system is in disarray. The cost of private health insurance is increasing at an annual rate in excess of 14 percent, far outpacing wages. Individuals are paying more out of pocket and receiving fewer benefits. 46.6 million Americans, including nine million children, are uninsured, and the number of uninsured is on the rise. States, suffering severe fiscal problems, are cutting eligibility and benefits in Medicaid and other health programs. Tens of thousands of people die from medical errors each year. Vital medical information continues to be withheld from pregnant women, sexually active teenagers, and populations at risk for STDs, while 87 percent of U.S. counties have no abortion provider.

As President, what will you do to solve our nation's health care crisis?

A. American families are struggling under the current system. As a Governor, I deal with these issues every single day. And I've done it by controlling costs and balancing the budget. It's time for the federal government to step up and get to work. A Democratic President will be inheriting a mess after 8 years of a Republican administration that has not invested in our nation's health. I had the same problem in New Mexico and am proud of my record in expanding access, improving quality, and controlling costs.

Since 2000, health care premiums for American families have risen by over 80 percent. People can't afford it. Each day, 4,000 *more* Americans lose coverage. All of us end up paying the price. The high costs are bad enough, but our healthcare system is also inefficient. About 31% of health care expenditures are for red tape instead of direct care. We have 50 different state Medicaid programs and a Medicare system administered by hundreds of different health plans. We need a responsible, common-sense approach. My plan consists of new ideas using proven methods. It will not create any new government bureaucracies, and it will not require any new taxes.

Imagine everyone having access to the same quality of healthcare as members of Congress and the President. Americans deserve no less. My plan includes the following solutions to achieve universal health care:

- ✓ Working families and small businesses will be able to purchase coverage through the same plan that members of Congress and the President have.
- ✓ Americans 55 to 64 will be able to purchase coverage through Medicare.

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- ✓ Veterans will get access to the high-quality care they deserve, when they need it, without bureaucratic hassles. Under my plan, every veteran returning from active duty would receive a Heroes Health Card that provides them with a choice of providers so that they can get the medical care they need even if they live far from a VA facility. No one who has served in our military should have to drive 100 miles just to get care, which is too often the case. It's high time we treat our military personnel and veterans with the respect they deserve. I've done it as Governor of New Mexico, and I'll do it as your next President.

My plan also keeps costs under control through a partnership between businesses, employees, and government – state & federal.

- ✓ Everyone who needs help in affording coverage will get an advance refundable tax credit based on income.
- ✓ We will clamp down on credit card companies that charge outrageous interest rates for medical care charges. Lenders need to do their fair share.
- ✓ Like auto insurance, all Americans will to be required to have health coverage and employers will pay their fair share of employee health care costs.
- ✓ We will invest in prevention, we will streamline administration, and we will support healthier lifestyle choices. As Governor I've done a lot of work in this area. We took junk food out of schools and put Physical Education back in. I've also signed a bill that bans smoking in all public buildings.

My plan is the reasonable and safe path to giving everyone in America access to quality healthcare. With my plan, no new government bureaucracies are created, and families who like their current plans can keep them. We don't need to raise taxes to get things done. We do need to reprioritize how we spend though. We've spent more than \$450 billion dollars on Iraq. Think of what we could do if we were to spend some of that money right in our own country, on healthcare for Americans.

It's time to make this happen. Americans want secure, affordable health care. My common-sense approach will help all Americans get to that day when they no longer have to worry about how they will afford health care.

ISSUE AREA: ENVIRONMENT. Our world is waking up to the implications of the damage we have done to our environment. The flow of ice from glaciers has doubled in the past decade. If nothing is done, sea levels could rise up to 20 feet. There are twice as many Category 4 and 5 hurricanes as there were 30 years ago. Without action, global warming will cause an estimated 300,000 deaths a year by 2035. Pollution continues to do damage. Nine million children have been diagnosed with asthma; between 1980 and 1994, the number of children under 5 with asthma increased by 160%. Each year, 1.8 million to 3.5 million illnesses are caused by swimming in water contaminated by sewage overflows and an additional 500,000 from drinking contaminated water.

As President, how will you address the crisis in climate change and the broader need to protect our environment?

A. The U.S. must lead the world in the fight against global warming, and the best way to lead is by example. This fight is the main reason why I'm running for President, and it will be the central element of the Richardson Presidency. That's why I believe we need a massive, Apollo-like program for energy independence through renewables, and that's what my energy plan will achieve.

The League of Conservation Voters said that I had an "aggressive" plan with the highest targets. Carl Pope, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, said that my "energy policy is much more aggressive than anything we've seen so far from the candidates." He added that it "is also significantly better-elaborated in theory with regard to where we end up."

My energy independence plan lays out a five point framework that breaks our oil addiction, creates competition and value for consumers, strengthens our national security, creates American jobs, and will lead the world toward effective climate protection. Below are the details of my plan:

Goal 1 – By 2020, dramatically reduce oil demand by as much as 50 percent through a series of bold measures. These measures include:

- ✓ Getting low and zero petroleum plug-in cars into the marketplace, while sharply reducing the carbon emissions from our electric sector. The pure-electric vehicle offers simplicity and performance for an average daily commute in our larger metro areas, while the plug-in electric car or truck provides more range and flexibility for people who drive longer distances, as it can extend gas mileage above 100 miles per gallon.
- ✓ Creating a well-to-wheels low carbon fuel requirement that reduces carbon impact of our liquid fuels by 30% by 2020, including ethanol and biodiesel. It will also require conventionally powered cars and trucks to be flex fuel capable and to provide tax credits to the first 10% of gasoline retailers who install renewable fuel pumps.
- ✓ Pushing fuel economy standards to 50 miles per gallon by 2020.
- ✓ Reducing oil consumption for other modes of transportation-ships, trains, trucks and planes through new technologies, such as fuel-switching to electricity and renewable fuels.

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Goal 2—Create new efficiencies and energy sources in the electrical sector:

- ✓ Call for a national renewable portfolio standard of 30% by 2020, rising to 50% by 2040—thus mandating utilities to provide a certain amount of renewable energy in the electricity sold to every consumer.
- ✓ Push for a law requiring a 20% improvement in energy productivity by 2020. This 20 by 20 proposal has been studied by the Western Governors Association and will save western customers \$21 billion a year by 2020. By 2030, there will be a 30% improvement.

Goal 3—Reduce greenhouse gas emissions at least 20% by 2020 and 90% by 2050.

- ✓ Start with a market-based cap and trade system. By 2020 utilities and industry will be allowed to emit 80% as much global warming pollution as they do today. Combined with transportation sector savings, these changes will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2020.
- ✓ Move to carbon-clean coal using safe, long-term carbon disposal or sequestration, and deploy these carbon-clean coal technologies here and around the world.

Goal 4—Capitalize and invest in America’s strengths in science and technology

- ✓ Establish a national energy innovation trust fund with a one-time funding commitment to provide needed research and technology support, invest in our world-leading institutions and science and technology programs.

Goal 5—America must lead by example and become a beacon of the New Energy Future.

- ✓ Immediately return to the international negotiating table and support mandatory limits on global warming pollution and keep atmospheric carbon below 450 parts per million.
- ✓ Cooperate with the European Union, the World Bank, the Asian partnership, the UN and our allies around the world to finance the small incremental cost of “doing it right.”
- ✓ Work closely with fast-growing nations like China, Brazil, South Africa, and India so that they use new, low-carbon technologies to help meet their energy demands.
- ✓ Renew our relations with our largest oil supplies, Mexico and Canada, which supply about 20% of our oil and create a North American Energy Council to stabilize the oil and gas trade, build a continental electrical grid, help bring energy resources and productivity to market throughout the continent and develop a regional system for carbon trading.

ISSUE AREA: EDUCATION. A high-quality public education is essential to ensure opportunity for all Americans. In 2000, 2 out of 3 fourth graders couldn't read proficiently and 7 out of 10 inner-city and rural fourth graders couldn't read at the most basic level. The most recent data on urban 12th graders finds that 84% are not proficient in math and 83% are not proficient in science. For students who do graduate, attending college now means taking on substantial debt as costs have risen and grants are scarce. Between 1994 and 2004, college costs skyrocketed by 30% and 26% at public and private colleges, respectively.

As President, how will you address the glaring deficiencies and persistent failures of so many schools in our public education system? How will you ensure access to higher education for all Americans?

A. As your question suggests, public education today is in dire straits throughout America. The U.S. continues to lag other first-world countries in educational progress. The American school system – designed for the early 20th century – must be restructured to meet the demands of the 21st.

There are a number of challenges facing America's education system today:

- **Lack of Access to Early Education.** Only 4 in 10 of the nation's three-year-olds and only 7 in 10 of four-year-olds participate in any kind of preschool education.
- **The Achievement Gap.** Minority and low-income kids are much more likely to begin their education without the necessary preparation – such as familiarity with letters and counting numbers. Since they're behind at the very start, they tend to fall further behind and by the fourth grade are reading about 3 years behind.
- **Math and Science Literacy is Under Par.** According to the National Center for Education Statistics, American fifteen-year-olds score lower in mathematics and science than students in most other developed countries.
- **Low High School Graduation Rates.** The high school graduation rate is about seventy percent, while the graduation rate of minorities is much lower: about 56% for African-American students and 52% for Hispanics.
- **Current and Future Teacher Shortages.** Over a million teachers will be retiring soon, and over the next ten years the United States will need more than two million new teachers. The shortage is most severe in urban and rural schools, and in subjects such as math, science, and special education.
- **Inadequate Enrollment and Preparation for Colleges and Universities.** Only 57% of students start college in the fall after graduating high school. Of those that do enroll in college, only 34% have college-ready skills. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that college costs have risen by nearly a third over the past decade.
- **Serious problems with No Child Left Behind.** The current implementation of NCLB serves more to punish the children and schools that need assistance, and deemphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship.

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Despite these challenges, I am optimistic about our country's ability to improve our education system and prepare young Americans for a successful future. Giving our young children a good start in their education has been a key priority of mine as Governor, and I'm proud of my record in New Mexico:

- ✓ Implemented free full-day kindergarten, available to every five-year-old.
- ✓ I also signed a bill, which was inspired by the late AFT National President Sandra Feldman, called the "Kindergarten through 3rd Grade Project." The program provides students in high-needs schools 20 days of additional instruction before the school year, and 20 days of additional instruction afterwards—and it's working. AFT Vice President Toni Cortese has expressed interest in coming to visit some of these schools, and I want to reiterate that invitation.
- ✓ Pre-Kindergarten. Launched a statewide public-private pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds.
- ✓ Increased funding for classrooms.
 - Invested more than \$600 million to modernize our schools and reduce class size, giving our teachers the resources necessary to provide high quality education.
 - Brought 5,000 laptops to New Mexico's 7th graders, bringing greater fluency and familiarity in technology.
- ✓ Earned National Recognition for Education Reform Efforts. New Mexico earned an "A" for assessments and school accountability in *Education Week's Quality Counts* report. The report also showed New Mexico in the top 6 in the nation for efforts to improve teacher quality, moving the state from 30th to 17th. New Mexico also earned the 3rd highest grade for resource equity.
- ✓ Expanded efforts to keep kids healthy
 - Moved New Mexico's ranking for fully immunized children from 49th in the nation to 30th.
 - Removed junk food from New Mexico's schools
 - Increased physical education classes and doubled the number of school based health centers
 - Implemented a medical and premium assistance program to ensure that every child five and under has access to health coverage.
 - Doubled the number of school-based health centers in New Mexico from 34 to 68.
 - Created a pilot program that allowed expecting mothers to request home visits from the state Children, Youth and Families Department. These visits helped to prepare mothers for the future, and to improve the health, both pre-natal and post-natal, of mother and child.

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As President, I will work closely with teachers and parents to prepare our young children for a lifetime of learning. Specifically, I will:

- ✓ Fully fund Head Start—which I was a strong supporter of while in Congress.
- ✓ Establish a federal Pre-K program that helps every state offer voluntary pre-kindergarten for every 4-year-old child.
- ✓ Promote more parental involvement. Teachers can't educate students in a vacuum; education must be a collaborative effort between home and school, and so we must provide supplementary funding for schools to expand their parent-teacher interaction and help parents become more involved in their children's education.
- ✓ Oppose private school tuition vouchers, especially when funds for vouchers compete with funds for overall improvements in America's public schools.
- ✓ Support and expand the number of public charter schools, but insist that they have the same standards of accountability and access as other public schools.

Of course, our children must be healthy in order to do well in school. With this in mind, I will also:

- ✓ Make guaranteed affordable health coverage available. This coverage should be used to keep us healthy as well as to pay for our illnesses. It should be affordable and portable, so Americans retain coverage even after moving or changing jobs.
- ✓ Expand SCHIP and improve outreach to ensure every American child.
- ✓ Increase obesity prevention and reduction efforts by promoting healthy lifestyles, expanding physical education in our schools, developing more stringent school nutrition guidelines, and strengthening private insurance coverage of obesity prevention and treatment for adults and children.
- ✓ Expand preventive care programs. Nationally, only 5% of our health care budget is spent on prevention. One way to reduce health care expenditures and costs is to prevent major health issues from arising in the first place.

ISSUE AREA: CIVIL RIGHTS. Despite significant progress, discrimination is still a reality for too many Americans. For every dollar white men earn, women earn approximately 77 cents, Latinas earn 56 cents, and African-American men earn 75 cents. Women are more likely to suffer violence; a woman is raped every 6 minutes and battered every 9 seconds. At the federal level and in most states gays and lesbians lack even basic civil rights protections. Affirmative action is being eliminated from the public sector, with colleges becoming increasingly homogeneous and opportunity blocked for many black and Latino students.

As President, what will you do to end discrimination and promote equality for all, regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation?

A. Adult women are currently the largest group who earn the minimum wage, and I have consistently supported an increase in the federal wage, and have achieved one in New Mexico. Moreover, I believe that it should be indexed for inflation, so that we do not have a repeat of the past ten years, when Republican Congresses and a Republican President have refused increases.

I also support the Paycheck Fairness Act, which will beef up enforcement, but I believe this bill does not go far enough. Much of the inequality would be eliminated if employers reported pay data by job classification, gender, and race. That way, employees would know if they were being treated fairly, and employers could see if they had a problem that needed correcting.

Job segregation (so-called “women’s jobs paying less than men’s” jobs) is another part of the problem. I support increased funding to train women in better paying jobs in non-traditional fields.

I have also long been a supporter of gay rights. People should not be judged based on their sexual orientation. Throughout my entire career I have fought for equal rights and against discrimination of any kind.

As Governor, I:

- Provided state health insurance to domestic partners in our state government.
- Signed into law the state’s first hate crimes legislation for acts including those based on sexual orientation.
- Expanded anti-discrimination laws to include sexual orientation.
- All of these were firsts for New Mexico.

I voted against “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” when I was a Congressman and I support repealing the policy for our military. If members of the GLBT community are willing to serve their country by being in the military, there should be no discrimination for their patriotism. As President, I will continue to fight for equal rights for ALL Americans.

I will also give the AIDS pandemic the attention it deserves by naming my Vice President as Chair of the HIV/AIDS Commission. We must work harder to find a cure for the disease that has taken such a tremendous toll upon Americans and people around the world.

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Finally, I have a long record of supporting affirmative action, ensuring that women and minority workers are given an equal shot at good jobs. We have made many strides as a nation, but unfortunately, economic inequality still exists.

Affirmative action is our good faith effort to ensure that equal opportunities in school, business, and entrepreneurship are available to those who, through discrimination, have found barriers in reaching for the American Dream.

It is one way we can level the playing field so that ALL can achieve the American Dream, regardless of one's background. Our tax dollars should not be used to subsidize companies, such as large government contractors, that do not provide equal opportunities for all workers.

It does NOT use quotas, and it is NOT about choosing the unqualified over the qualified.

As President, I will continue to support Affirmative Action programs that are fair and that provide more opportunities for those who have endured a long history of discrimination.

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The following three issues were a top priority for a significant number of participants. We would appreciate hearing your views on these questions as well.

ISSUE AREA: WAGES. Millions of working families struggle to make ends meet because their jobs fail to pay a living wage. Wages have fallen by 3.2% in real terms since October of 2001, while inflation and costs of living continue to rise. With the federal minimum wage stuck at \$5.15/hour for almost 10 years, 31 states have recognized the inadequacy of \$11,000/year and raised the minimum wage on the state level. Still, there are an estimated 7.4 million Americans who are classified as working poor.

As President, what will you do to lift hard-working American families out of poverty?

A. I will restore this country's focus on the middle class. Families in this country are squeezed, and they need a fair shake. Over the past several years, middle class incomes have declined; although worker productivity has increased, the gains have gone into profits at the top rather than toward wages and salaries for most Americans. Real earnings, pensions and health insurance benefits are dropping, while the costs of living are rising.

The next President needs to fight for higher salaries, stronger benefits, and lower costs for America's families.

That's got to start with job creation and economic growth: I would roll back the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest two percent and keep the tax cuts for the middle class. Instead of tax cuts for the wealthy, I would propose a tax credit for companies that create jobs here in America that pay above the prevailing wage.

In New Mexico we provided these incentives for jobs that pay a good wage and that provide health benefits. As a result, we became the state with the sixth highest job growth rate in the country; more than 80,000 new jobs. We grew the economy in New Mexico, and I'll do the same as President.

We also need to help families with the cost side of the equation. Health care, child care, college – they all cost too much.

In New Mexico, we provided access to health care coverage to every child under six. We established early childhood programs for four-year-olds and we guaranteed kindergarten to every five-year-old. And we expanded our college scholarship program so more people could get the education and training they need. And we did all of that while cutting taxes, balancing the budget, and increasing our state's rainy day funds by billions.

As President, I will further focus on helping middle- and low-income families by creating a universal health care system, providing early childhood education, expanding the opportunity for every American to attend college, and eliminating the Alternative Minimum Tax for the Middle Class.

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The United States also should do its part to fight poverty throughout the world. As President, I will lead a multinational Marshall Plan for the 21st Century that coordinates aid, education, and health care to Africa and the Middle East. Such an effort benefits not only those living in abject poverty, but it also benefits our own nation by ensuring a more stable, more secure global community.

ISSUE AREA: SENIORS. Seniors in America remain increasingly vulnerable. Half of today's workers do not have any retirement plan on the job and more employers have stopped offering guaranteed pension benefits. Americans' savings rate is now less than zero; only about half of families have any retirement savings. Seniors who want to remain independent are forced into nursing homes, instead of receiving personal care at home or in assisted living facilities. Health care costs continue to claim a greater share of seniors' fixed income.

As President, what will you do to ensure that our seniors have financial and medical security?

A. As President, I will:

- **Protect Social Security.** The first step is to balance the federal budget and refuse to privatize Social Security. Private accounts are individual savings accounts, while Social Security is a solemn commitment and safety net for America's retirees.
- **Ensure that an adequate amount of to allocate a guaranteed amount of funding to the Social Security trust fund each year.** Funding must be reserved for the Social Security trust fund. America's seniors must be assured that their safety net will not be diminished at any time during their retirement.
- **Pass legislation to increase protections for the Social Security fund.** Money in the Social Security trust fund must not be used for any other purpose, and we need tough laws to protect it.
- **Work with seniors, Congress, and the pharmaceutical companies to reduce prescription drug prices.** America's seniors must never be forced to choose between groceries and the medication they need to stay healthy. Medicare must have the authority to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower prescription drug prices, and we must explore re-importation of safe prescription drugs from Canada.
- **Help Employers Honor their Pension Promises.** Give pensions higher priority than management compensation in bankruptcy proceedings. Companies must not be able to use bankruptcy as a way to walk away from pension obligations.

Medicare represents a different and greater challenge, but one that together we can successfully address. We can reduce Medicare costs substantially and improve care with universal health insurance that includes prevention, such as with diabetes and hypertension. The Bush Medicare Part D plan, however, is both medically inadequate and fiscally unsustainable. Because it was written by the vested interests for the vested interests, it creates problems for seniors such as:

- Seniors, particularly low-income seniors, have been forced into private drug plans that don't cover the drugs they need and have high co-pays.
- Seniors are locked into their private plan for a year, but their drug plan can change the drugs they cover as often as every week.
- The so-called "doughnut hole" is a gap in benefits that requires seniors to pay all costs between \$2,250 and \$5,100 of their annual prescription drug bill.
- Seniors must choose among dozens of plans with different premiums, deductibles, co-payments, covered drugs, and access to local pharmacies.

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- The law makes it illegal for Medicare to negotiate drug prices with manufacturers, even though the Department of Veterans Affairs has used negotiation to save \$100 million over the past two years.
- The drug companies will receive an additional \$139.2 billion in profits over the next eight years, 61% of the spending generated by the bill.
- As President, I will make Medicare work in the best interest of seniors, not the drug companies.

ISSUE AREA: IMMIGRATION. America is a nation of immigrants. Yet today's immigrants face an atmosphere of hostility, violence, and a badly broken system of laws. Employers depend on immigrant labor, but recent policies have emphasized only enforcement, leading to worker exploitation. From 1986 to 1998, the border patrol budget increased sixfold and the number of agents on the southern border doubled to 8,500. Despite these efforts, millions of undocumented immigrants arrived to work in our fields, hospitals, and restaurants. Only 5,000 visas per year are granted for unskilled workers.

As President, what is your plan for fixing our broken immigration system?

A. I am committed to both enforcing our borders and pushing for immigration reform. Despite what some critics allege, these goals are not mutually exclusive. We need tough, effective border control—and building a fence will not increase security; only more border patrol manpower will. I believe in *realistic* immigration reform that requires undocumented workers to earn their legal status. If they are to remain in our country, they must pay fines for illegally crossing the border, learn English, pay taxes, and obey our laws.

In New Mexico, in 2005, I declared a State of Emergency along the border with Mexico. Violent crime, drugs, and lawlessness were out of control, and no one in Washington D.C. was addressing the issue. The declaration made \$1.75 million available to local law enforcement along the border. As a result, law enforcement increased the number of drug arrests and caught more undocumented immigrants. The New Mexico border town of Village of Columbus, for example, saw an 80 percent reduction in crime.

As President, I will secure the border by hiring and training enough patrol guards to cover the entire border. We need to more than double the number of guards at the border and provide them with the best surveillance technology available.

We must establish a *realistic* path to legalization for those who are already here. This is *not* amnesty, but an effort that draws out those already here by offering legal status in exchange for good behavior, learning English, payment of back taxes, and fines for illegal entry. Applicants would also pay an application fee and undergo a medical examination and background check. Those who break the law they will be immediately and permanently deported. The number of guest workers allowed at any one time must be based upon the needs of the US economy. The goal must be to meet demand for jobs that go unfilled by American citizens, and no more.

We also must crack down on immigration fraud and illegal workers by:

- Offering “informant visas” and cash rewards for aliens who provide law enforcement with credible information on human traffickers and document forgers.
- Establishing a “fraudulent documents task force” to constantly update law enforcement and border officials on the latest fraudulent documents being marketed for entry into the United States.

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- Improving identification documentation of immigrant workers. We need a national system to reliably and instantaneously verify the legal status of every job applicant and worker. We cannot stop illegal immigration if we continue to look the other way on illegal employment.
- Stepping up enforcement and increase fines and/or jail time for employers who hire undocumented immigrants. After establishing an ID system, employers will have no excuses: those who knowingly hire undocumented workers must face serious and certain penalties.

I also believe we must work in partnership with the Mexican government and other nations. We must develop border infrastructure to move goods through the free-trade zones along the border, revitalizing communities on both sides of the border and creating much-needed jobs. We will also work with the Secretary of the Organization of American States on Latin American initiatives that focus on economic development and immigration. We need to demonstrate to OAS member states that they have an equal responsibility to solve the immigration problem.