

A National Unemployment Rate for Spanish speaking Americans

Mr. President, we live in a society in which significant change often seems to come in sudden bursts in reaction to disclosure of a situation that has existed for many years.

In the decade of the 1960's, Americans "discovered" many things about their society that had been hidden or had become invisible beneath a veneer of postwar prosperity.

We discovered that there were nearly 40 million Americans living in poverty.

We discovered millions of American adults and children hungry and living on inadequate diets.

We discovered that our environment was being poisoned to the extent that our health was in danger.

We discovered that much more had to be done in Congress and all across the nation to secure equal opportunity for millions of Black Americans.

And we discovered that American cities were becoming unlivable for the millions of Americans forced to live in them and for those who yearly migrated to urban America from rural areas.

The American public was made aware of these great domestic problems by men and women in and out of government willing to look and probe beneath the surface of American society. As a result of their courage and foresight the United States has begun to confront these problems and to identify how they might be solved. Progress has been made. Certainly not enough. But at least we are aware of the scope and magnitude of what must be done to improve the quality of life for all Americans.

But the identification of the urgent needs and problems of millions of Americans during the 1960's was not by any means a complete or thorough process.

And in the hectic pace of public discovery and commitment of resources, there were groups of people left behind and problems unidentified. I do not believe that we can continue to rely in the 1970's on a somewhat haphazard system of identification of existing and often deep-rooted problems that suddenly become crises when the public is made aware of them by a perceptive book, magazine article or television program.

The federal government itself must take a more active role in bringing to the attention of all the government agencies and all branches of government in addition to private organizations and individuals, the needs of people.

I am introducing today a Senate Joint Resolution which will begin to have the federal government identify the economic and social condition of 12 to 15 million Spanish speaking Americans.

I believe these people have been left behind in our efforts to eradicate poverty, provide justice, and eliminate racial prejudice in American life.

The 12 to 15 million Americans who identify themselves as Spanish speaking trace their origins from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South American and other Spanish speaking

countries. Slightly more than half of these people are Mexican American origin with nearly 20 percent of this population comprising people of Puerto Rican origin.

The plight of Spanish speaking Americans is one of a people striving for justice and equal opportunity. They continue to be the victims of racial, economic, social and political discrimination which forces them into a type of second class citizenship. And although their self-identity and racial pride have been reinforced in the past few years as they attempt to gain the equal rights they deserve, national public awareness of the urgency of their special needs is negligible.

In many cities throughout the nation -- in Los Angeles, New York, Denver, San Antonio and Chicago, to name just a few -- many Spanish speaking Americans live in a cycle of poverty from which it is extremely difficult to escape.

Deplorable housing, poor diets, an education designed primarily for white middle class children, job discrimination, menial labor, and unemployment are all part of "barrio" life in American cities and towns. In New York city, 55 percent of the Puerto Rican males over 25 living in an identified poverty area had less than 8 years of education. And in Los Angeles, 69 percent of the Mexican-American residents of East Los Angeles between 25 and 34 years of age completed less than four years of high school.

Education is the key to greater economic and social opportunity in American life.

And the special bilingual needs of Spanish speaking children, though much discussed, are not being met by either the federal or state governments. Bilingual education is essential not only to retain cultural self-identity, but to improve the learning processes of American children whose mother tongue is not English. The failure of Spanish speaking children to learn and achieve in school is often the result of language problems. It is understandable that the dropout rate among Spanish speaking in high schools is very high.

The poverty cycle in which millions of Spanish speaking Americans are caught leads inevitably to dead-end jobs, menial labor, and unemployment. And unemployment is rampant in Spanish speaking communities all across the nation.

We know that unemployment is serious among Spanish speaking teenagers and adults and far surpasses the high unemployment rate among whites. Unemployment figures for Spanish speaking citizens are provided at irregular intervals by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But there is no monthly report of national unemployment among the Spanish speaking published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in their monthly summary which is widely reported in the press and on television.

At the beginning of each month the American public is informed of the national unemployment rate for the white and black population. I see absolutely no reason why America's second largest minority -- the Spanish speaking -- should be excluded from this reporting procedure especially since regional statistics indicate that unemployment among the Spanish speaking is greater than white unemployment and is equal to or greater than the alarming level of black unemployment.

Members of congress, the public and certainly members of the Executive agencies and departments have a need to know the monthly unemployment rate for Spanish speaking citizens.

No one can tell me that 12 to 15 million people represent too insignificant a group to be included in the Department of Labor's monthly statistical reporting.

I am sure than my colleagues on both sides of the aisle would agree that the commitment of federal, state and private resources cannot occur without an accurate assessment of need. The social statistics concerning the condition of America's Spanish speaking citizens are needed now without continued delay.

The Joint Resolution that I am offering today asks the Department of Labor and the Census Bureau to cooperate in order to include the national unemployment rate of Spanish speaking

Americans in the monthly unemployment report for the white and black population published on the first Thursday of every month.

The resolution further asks the Labor and Agriculture Departments and the Census Bureau to publish statistics that will provide indicators of the social and economic condition of Spanish speaking citizens in urban and rural America.

Mr. President, we are a nation that is desperately in need of more information about all of our people. I believe that we can no longer continue to view the degradation and misery of poverty and hunger in America without knowing its exact dimensions so that we can provide the resources to eradicate it.

The Spanish speaking Americans are rightly demanding equality and justice. But I do not see how we can begin to meet these demands unless we are cognizant of the true needs of this great people.

Too much time has passed for us to delay any more. The federal government must be responsive. The progress of Chicanos, Boricuas and Hispanos towards justice and equality must not be delayed. I think the first step is recognition and public awareness of need. After this, we must begin to provide the tools to meet demands that have gone unmet for too many decades.



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