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National Latino/Hispanic AIDS Leadership Summit – Day 1 Celebrating Victories and Making a New Path January 29, 2008

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[START RECORDING]

FEMALE SPEAKER: It is my pleasure to introduce to you Congressman Luis Gutierrez.

[Applause]

LUIS GUTIERREZ: Thank you. It is a pleasure to be here this evening. All right, let me, I'm getting older. I have to put the glasses on. [Laughter] I want to thank all of the leadership that is coming together this evening for this important summit. Many thanks to James Albino and Dennis De Leon and Marcie Lopez and everyone at the National Latino/Hispanic AIDS Leadership Summit for saying in one voice the time is now.

I want to thank you for taking the time to organize and strategize and demand that we work together to take the next step towards solving the AIDS crisis in the Latino community.

I know this is tough. Organizing is hard; getting all the leaders in one room is hard. Coordinating a message and an agenda is hard. Agreeing on a plan is hard. But nothing we do is as hard as the effects of AIDS on the people we care about and love. Nothing is as hard as what will happen to our people if we do nothing so I thank you and commend you and I want to add my voice of support the Latino AIDS Action Agenda.

I want to be clear about something from the

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beginning. I like the word action. Those of you who know me might be aware that I like to take action and I'm for all groups that want to take action. I like action because [applause] if our Latino communities learned anything in our history, particularly our recent history, it's that we don't get much when we don't take action. It doesn't always work to ask quietly.

You know I like manners. My mom made sure I had some. Not as many as she would have liked but I have some. And I always encourage courtesy, but some problems are too big, some challenges are too large, and some things we have just been waiting too long for us to ask nicely and just simply hope for the best.

Immigration is one of those issues. And I will talk about that for a minute. [Applause] The AIDS crisis facing our community is another. When it comes to AIDS, the numbers don't lie and the problem must be resolved. I'm pleased that the number of new infections and AIDS cases is continuing to drop in the Angelo community. That's a good thing. But it is absolutely unacceptable.

It is outrageous that our Latino community continues to experience higher infection rates, higher rates of new AIDS cases, and a higher rate of death due to AIDS. There should be no mistake these numbers cannot be allowed to stand. There is no reason and no excuse for community to

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stand alone in not making progress in fighting AIDS.

What does it take to make sure there are no excuses? It takes action. That is why I'm thrilled that so many leaders and experts are coming together to take collaborative action at the federal, state, and local level. And I want to make my pledge to you today, tonight very clear. Whatever you believe helps our community fight AIDS I am there to deliver for you. If the answer is funding and research and I'm sure that's part of the answer, I will stand with you.

[Applause] If the answer is more awareness and outreach, I'm sure that's part of the answer, I will stand with you. [Applause] If the answer is more education and understanding and I'm sure it is, I will stand with you. and if the answer is that you need an advocate, if the answer is that you need a member of Congress who won't take no for an answer, if you need someone who will fight harder and yell louder than those who refuse to take this crisis seriously, then I will stand with you. [Applause]

What I will never, what I won't stand for is our community being left out and being left behind. So let's take the appropriate action together because the consequences are too serious if we don't. Our nation and our community face so many challenges. I know that it can be hard to get the attention and commitment this problem deserves but in equities in AIDS infection rates and death rates is a public

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health crisis and a crisis for our Latino community.

Attention must be paid.

And I will say it again; we will only get results because of a concerted, coordinated action. I want to leave you with one last thought about action and the results that coordinated action can get for our people. As many of you might know, I give special attention and consideration in the Congress to our immigrant community and immigration reform. And not unlike AIDS, immigration is an issue that specifically and unfairly is targeting Latinos.

You know and I know that immigrants come to our nation every day not because they want to break our laws or get a free ride or take advantage of benefits or take jobs away from us. No, they come, our parents and grandparents came for a very simple reason to work, to contribute, to build a better life for their families and a better America for everyone else.

And across our nation [applause] from Miami to the Bronx to LA to Texas to Little Village and Logan Square in Chicago, Latinos have built and remade the America we know. [Applause]

And yet we are targets for scorn, for criticism, for the cheapest of political shots that the most cowardly of politicians throw on us. And yet what do we do? Hide? Surrender? Apologize? No, we take action. We fight and we

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work and we will win the immigration debate because America is a better place [applause] because of immigrants and our cause is just and I believe in America though the path is not always as clear and straight as it should be but in the end, justice will be served to our immigrant community in this country because of our action. And if we take action, the same will be true in our fight against AIDS because of you and your work and your coordination and your action we will win.

I want to take a few moments because I was especially touched to see all of the flags as I looked up from the podium. And it reminded me of a wonderful experience I in Chicago. It was, I had been in Congress for six, seven years and I was walking in a part of my Congressional District and it was in back of the yards 47th and Ashland for those of you who know anything about Chicago.

And this gentleman, he must have been 6'3", 6'4", a couple of hundred pounds. He had his white hat, had his jeans on, had the buckle. He had the denim shirt and he came up to me and he said, "Luis, [Spanish Spoken]. And I just described how huge he was. [Laughter] And he had a strong grip. And I said, [Spanish Spoken], hoping he would release the hold that [laughter] he had on my hand. But he said [Spanish Spoken]. I was like hurry before the blood circulation, man. [Laughter] [Spanish Spoken] [Laughter] [Applause]

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And as the public always welders, so they are so truthful. I said, "Yes, [Spanish Spoken] I only thought that all right. So, he said [Spanish Spoken] and I felt like telling him please tell me. [Laughter] But he said [Spanish Spoken]. [Laughter] [Applause]

I tell that story to Latino groups because it was a, I mean do you visualize this man. Do you see his hat? [Laughter] Do you see his shirt? [Spanish Spoken]. [Applause] [Spanish Spoken].

[Applause]

FEMALE SPEAKER: Congressman Gutierrez, thank you for not only being a true leader but a true inspiration to our community. Everyone I hope you are enjoying your meal, enjoying the company and you enjoyed your day. And we also want you to enjoy the party. So when the music comes I want to see everyone on the dance floor. Have a good night.

[END RECORDING]