

**Remarks of FCC Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts
Noche de Gala
Renaissance Mayflower Hotel
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As prepared for delivery

!Buenas noches! ¿Como están? Gracias por su invitación de permitirme hablar aquí. Mí familia tiene una historia muy larga con America Latino. Cuando era un niño, mí padre vivía en el norte de Mexico en una finca. Mas tarde, mís padres vivían en el estado de Jalisco en Mexico. Y cuando yo era un niño, mís padres hablaban en Espanol cuando no querían que nosotros entendamos lo que ellos necesitaban decirse enfrente di mí, mís hermanos y mí hermana. Entonces, yo tenía un incentivo de aprender Español. Sin embargo, el Español que mís padres hablaban es perfecto; pero mí Español es muy limitado. Por esta razón, voy a hablar en Inglés esta noche. But my English isn't much better.

Congratulations to Kenny Ortega for being chosen as the recipient of the Raul Julia Award for Excellence. The award is well-deserved for the inspiration you provide to all Americans, and especially Hispanic Americans.

As we all know, the Hispanic community comprises the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. The power of Latinos – as a consumer group, a voting bloc and a creative force – is growing. Clearly, America has begun to take notice. My favorite statistic crystallizing this phenomenon is this: More salsa is consumed in the United States each year than ketchup! That says it all. A similar trend is making itself clear in presidential politics too: the highest-rated Presidential debate of this election cycle, thus far, was broadcast on Spanish-language television. Nielsen reported that approximately 6 million viewers watched it on Univision.

By sheer luck, my very first vote as a Commissioner involved an important community within Hispanic America: Cuban Americans and their relatives in Cuba. I supported the strengthening of the signal for Television Martí to broadcast messages of hope and freedom into Cuba. While at the FCC, I have made it a priority to create new windows of opportunity for the benefit of all Americans, including Hispanic Americans. In fact, earlier this year I traveled to Mexico City, the largest Spanish-speaking city in the world, to try to help American-produced Spanish language content get on the air in Mexico. It seems that it's very easy for Latin-American-produced, Spanish-language content to reach audiences in the U.S. But sometimes when American companies produce high-quality Spanish-language programming and try to broadcast it in Mexico, the authorities literally call in the SWAT teams and pursue criminal prosecution. But if we can resolve this situation, we can create more jobs for Hispanics in the arts in the second largest Spanish-speaking city in the world – Los Angeles – produce the best programming in the world, and distribute it throughout a free and fair international market! The demand for Hispanic content is growing exponentially; and no one produces better programming than Hispanic Americans.

And I applaud the Foundation for expanding career opportunities for Latinos in all aspects of entertainment and the performing arts. Thanks in large part to the Foundation, the Latino diversity both in front of, and behind the camera on mainstream outlets has grown immensely. My first memory of Latino performers was the classic Western “The Cisco Kid” with Duncan Renaldo and Leo Carillo. Cisco, and his sidekick Pancho, were crimefighters – an unusual positive portrayal of Hispanic role models in early American TV. And we’ve come a long way since then. Decades later, Jimmy Smits took us from attorney Victor Sifuentes on “L.A. Law” to playing the President Elect on “The West Wing.”

With the strides that your members have made, we also have several Latina leading ladies on prime time TV, like Eva Longoria and Eva La Rue. My children can watch “Maya and Miguel” on PBS. By the way, Jennifer and I are teaching them Spanish, a McDowell family tradition now in its sixth generation. Last year, we were treated to the originality and heart of the first season of “Ugly Betty,” produced by a Latina of Mexican descent and a Cuban-American and starring a family from Mexico, portrayed by actors of Honduran, Puerto Rican and Cuban descent. Last month, we saw the premiere of “Cane,” an epic drama about a large Cuban-American family that owns a rum and sugar empire, simulcast in Spanish, and also starring Latino actors representing a wide range of ethnicities. As a society, we have a terrific opportunity to educate the American public about the rich cultural heritages of the different ethnic groups that comprise the Hispanic community. And this Foundation’s mission helps do just that.

More Latinos are also involved in creating, writing and directing TV programs and movies on the highest level. This year’s Academy Award nominations were dominated by directors Alfonso Cuarón (for “Children of Men”), Guillermo del Toro (for “Pan’s Labyrinth”) and Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (for “Babel”), as well as a number of other prominent Spanish-speaking performers and people behind the movie magic. Latinos including Nina Tassler (President, CBS Entertainment), Armando Nunez Jr. (President, CBS Paramount International Television) and Belinda Menendez (President, NBC Universal International Television Distribution) and many others also have risen to the highest ranks of network management.

I congratulate the Foundation for the progress it and its members have made and hope that you will continue your work as pioneers for the next generation of industry stars, executives and creative talent. I am sure that the Foundation’s scholarships to Latino graduate students pursuing a career in entertainment, telecommunications and media will ensure that this movement towards

greater diversity continues. I thank you – particularly the founders of this great organization (Jimmy Smits, Esai Morales, Sonia Braga, and Felix Sanchez) -- for your commitment to giving back to your communities and making America stronger as a result.

I hope that we at the Federal Communications Commission can be of help. In recent years, we have seen the demand for creative content explode with technological advances and changes in the industry. The transition to digital TV will allow broadcasters to produce several streams of programming where there had been only one. I hope to see Spanish-language broadcasters expand the local news and information and entertainment they provide to their local communities by using the additional channels that spectrum technology can now provide. Advances in digital radio technology are presenting similar opportunities. I hope to see that additional space taken up by more Spanish news and talk radio, like we have seen with ESPN Deportes Radio with Jorge Ramos and Henan Pereyra, and Tu Vida Es Mi Vida Con Maria Marin. Also, cable channels have developed incredibly successful original programming to compete with broadcasters and to serve niche audiences, including the Hispanic community. We now have MTV Tr3s (Tres) and the movie channel De Pelicula, for example, offered on tiers of cable and satellite services aimed toward Hispanic viewers. According to “The State of the American News Media, 2007,” published by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Spanish language and other ethnic media are the only major traditional media sectors with audience growth.

The emergence of new media will only increase the demand for content and provide an incubator for developing new talent. YouTube and other websites, and do-it-yourself filming technologies, have created outlets for every tech savvy individual to direct a video or movie of his or her own. New media also provides the opportunity, on a less capital-intensive basis, to educate, to organize, and to inform the Hispanic community about timely and important issues and

developments. News distribution services like Hispanic PR Wire and blogs like HispanicTips have started down this path. Sites like HispanicSurf.com are making progress to connect the Latino community. I encourage you to seek the opportunities that new media is providing.

With these advances and with the goal of promoting diversity in mind, the Commission is looking at several policy matters. We are currently reviewing our media ownership rules, which limit the number of television and radio outlets that can be owned by a single entity in a market, and which prohibit anyone, including minorities, from owning a newspaper and broadcast property in the same market. I am concerned that so few minorities and women own broadcast outlets and I'm seeking ideas for solutions that government can provide to promote the sale of stations to women and people of color.

One idea I endorse is the use of tax incentives, like the tax certificate program we had for years, which bolstered minority ownership. This incentive was repealed by Congress in 1995 by an overwhelmingly bi-partisan vote. And restoring it will take Congressional action. However, providing the right incentives so that more minorities can be owners, rather than renters, in traditional and new media outlets is a laudable goal that will work to the benefit of all Americans by providing a diversity of views and portrayals. I hope that we can work together to find ways to help all of us reach that goal.

Otra vez: gracias para su invitacion. Felicitaciones a Kenny Ortega. Vayan con Dios, y buenas noches.