

Reyes challenges Texas churches to 'fill the gap' to leave no child behind_41904

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Reyes challenges Texas churches to 'fill the gap' to leave no child behind

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Texas Baptist Communications

SAN ANTONIO-The federal government asked Albert Reyes to help address what U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has called the nation's "most important civil rights issue"-the academic achievement gap between Hispanic and Anglo students on standardized exams.

In turn, Reyes is challenging his fellow churchmen to play a key role in that battle in the Lone Star state.

Rod Paige
honors
Albert
Reyes for
his
leadership
as
chairman
of the
Hispanic
Task
Force for
the No
Child Left
Behind
initiative.

"Texas Baptists are in the best position to immediately fill the gap with tutoring and volunteerism in public schools," Reyes, president of the Baptist University of the Americas and first vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, told an audience of 800 educators and parents recently.

"Texas Baptists have the opportunity to tangibly impact our state by considering educational initiatives focused on the Hispanic community—a kind of focus that resonates with our historic focus on missions, evangelism, Christian education and human welfare."

Comments by Paige and Reyes highlighted the national kickoff rally at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio for President George Bush's No Child Left Behind effort.

At a reception earlier, Paige presented Reyes with an award for his work as

chairman of the Hispanic Task Force for No Child Left Behind. He was appointed to the position last May and helped form a faith-based task force, charged with disseminating information on the initiative to Hispanic families through local churches across the country.

“Dr. Reyes is a wonderful gentleman and a committed citizen to the children,” Paige said. “Working with him has been a delight.”

The educational reform act, which demands a high-quality education for all children, is based on four principles—accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and an emphasis on proven methods of teaching. It passed Congress with bipartisan support but has drawn criticism that it is not being adequately funded.

“If we want to close the achievement gap, we must help empower parents,” Paige noted. “Through this outreach effort, we are crossing language and cultural barriers so that all children in our great nation, including those who are English learners, receive the quality of education they deserve.”

Paige also explained the reasoning behind the faith-based task force. “We know that Hispanics and other minority groups rely on their places of worship to receive information and guidance, and that is why our partnership with these organizations is vital to ensuring that parents know what No Child Left Behind means for their children.”

The Education Department's deputy under-secretary, Maria Hernandez Ferrier, emphasized how important this legislation is for Hispanics and other minorities.

“There are many great schools, administrators and teachers in our country, but we all know that many of our children have not received the quality of education they need to succeed. The results have been that Hispanics now have the highest dropout rate and some of the lowest test scores, and many are not prepared to enter institutions of higher learning,” she said.

“No Child Left Behind now ensures that all children are given basic quality instruction that will give them the opportunity to achieve their greatest academic potential.”

Ferrier also praised Reyes.

“Dr. Reyes has been a tremendous leader in bringing together Hispanic faith-based leaders from across the country to spread the good news of No Child Left Behind,” she said. “Dr. Reyes and the task force leaders know that we have the gospel of faith—believing in our Lord Jesus Christ—but he also asked us to take care of our children, and that's exactly what the wonderful task force members are doing.”

The next step for the task force is to promulgate the message to 16 key cities across the nation. “We will take the message of No Child Left Behind to parents across the country through local congregations and clergy. I will be going personally to some of these places, but not all of them,” Reyes said.

Reyes was happy with the success of the kickoff event, and he said a solid foundation for educational improvement has been laid.

“I believe we are on the right track and have placed the needs of families and children above everything else,” he said. “It was exciting to initiate this educational partnership with the United States Department of Education and to see how all our work for the past eight months has paid off.”

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