



DoD Wants More Hispanics in Civilian Workforce, Military Ranks

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

ANAHEIM, Calif., Oct. 19, 2003 -- As the Hispanic population soars across the country, the Defense Department is hankering to increase their numbers in its civilian workforce and military ranks. But, so far, young Hispanics don't seem to be getting the message.

[Charles Abell](#), principal undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said DoD can't spread the word by conducting its observance of Hispanic American Heritage Month in the Pentagon auditorium and just talking to the defense community.



If the Defense Department wants to spread the word about civilian and military job opportunities, it's necessary to take the Pentagon's programs to the nation and to the nation's students, Charles Abell, principal undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, told attendees at DoD's Oct. 17 Hispanic American Heritage Month observance luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Orange County Hotel in Anaheim, Calif. Photo by Rudi Williams (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

That's why he and other DoD personnel and readiness officials decided to hit the road for places where large numbers of Hispanic youngsters live, work and attend school.

"Why not take the Pentagon's program to the nation and to the nation's students?" Abell asked the audience during DoD's Oct. 17 Hispanic American Heritage Month observance luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Orange County Hotel here.

"Why not construct a partnership that would combine information about military and civilian opportunities within DoD with a celebration and recognition of Hispanics?" Abell continued. "If DoD wants to increase the representation of Hispanics in senior civilian and military leadership positions, it much improve access for Hispanics to information about military and civilian career opportunities within the department."

With the help of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, DoD invited students from Orange County area middle and high schools and colleges to the luncheon. The services and DoD agencies also erected exhibits to showcase civilian and military job opportunities, including attendance at the military academies.

Abell noted that DoD and HACU kicked off the two-day event on Oct. 16 with a technical assistance workshop for

representatives from HACU member institutions and other Hispanic-Serving Institutions. DoD also held a summit with representatives from the military departments, including the Coast Guard. It included briefings on current efforts to implement a set of DoD Hispanic initiatives originally issued in 2000. They also discussed how to improve efforts to increase Hispanic representation in the military and civilian workforce.

Statistically, Abell said, DoD employs more than 650,000 civilians, of whom some 40,000 are Hispanics. There are 1.4 million active duty service members, more than 130,000 of whom are Hispanic. Of the more than 870,000 Ready Reserve members, more than 71,500 are Hispanic.

"Even during times of tension, however, it's also important that we take time to observe Hispanic Heritage Month and to celebrate the contributions made by Hispanics to this nation, particularly to its defense," the undersecretary said. "Being able to do this, as a Pentagon official in partnership with an Hispanic education association and an assembly of students, is significantly meaningful to me and, I hope, moving to you."

Abell, who met with and talked to some of the students earlier, told them that though it may sound trite to them, "You are the future leaders and defenders of our nation."

The keynote luncheon speaker was Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, who has received numerous awards and citations from schools, agencies and professional organizations. Hispanic, Saturn and Glamour magazines have recognized her with the Latina Leadership Excellence Award and the 2002 "Women at Their Best" award that's presented to the top 100 women in the country.

"What an incredible gift you have today. How symbolic, and how unique this summit is. You, the young men and women, are in the best of our times," Kickbusch told the students. "They've come to you, to your backyard, and are offering you an opportunity to join the ranks as a professional in the federal government."

A well-known motivational speaker, Kickbusch told the audience about being born and raised in a barrio/ghetto in Laredo, Texas, and how she and her nine brothers and sisters became successful in spite of poverty, humiliation and illiteracy problems. She talked about visiting her barrio -- the "Devil's Den" -- years ago while still on active duty.

"People were always told not to go there -- don't take your car because you won't get it back," said Kickbusch, who, prior to retirement from the Army, was the highest-ranking Hispanic in the combat support field. "I never understood such comments because no one in my barrio owned a car."

In her speech, Kickbusch incorporated years of experience -- good things and bad things -- to inspire the students toward success. Life wasn't easy and everybody wasn't nice when she was growing up in the barrio, she noted. For example, Kickbusch talked about her kindergarten teacher telling her, "Today, we're going to learn your name and how to write it. Today, your name is Connie."

"No! My name is Consuelo. Maybe you didn't hear me," Kickbusch said she responded.

"No, you didn't hear me. I'm the teacher, and your name is Connie," her instructor said.

Kickbusch fired back, "It will never be Connie!"

"Why are you so stubborn? It's less letters," the teacher responded.

"Why is it a problem for you? I'm the one who is going to write it," Kickbusch said she responded. "Of course, I wasn't one of her favorite students."

She said her father taught her, "Your word is your promise. Don't you ever play or make a mockery of anyone's dignity or respect."

Kickbusch asked the students to "open their minds and hearts and allow us to teach you, because we mean nothing but the best for you. My father taught me that when you're not educated, someone will put a price on

your head," she said. "So I hope that you will make an investment in your mind. For our backs are tired of always doing the job that no one else wanted."

Kickbusch has produced an educational video titled, "Porque No -- Why Not?" in honor of her parents. The video resulted from a run-in with a high school counselor who advised her that a child from the barrio could never aspire to a college education.

After she related the incident to her father, she said, he told her to always ask, "Porque no -- Why not?" whenever someone tries to deny opportunities.

Senior military officials attending the event included Walter Somerville, assistant Coast Guard commandant for civil rights; William Navas, assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs; Michael Dominguez, assistant secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve affairs; and Luther Santiful, director of the Army's Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights.

Antonio Flores, the organization's president and chief executive officer, led HACU representatives.

California Army National Guard Col. Hector E. Topete delivered a memorial tribute -- the missing-man table and honors ceremony -- as part of DoD's traditional observance ceremonies in honor of fallen heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect and defend the nation. Topete, inspector general of the Office of the Adjutant General, State of California, was born in Mexico and moved to the United States with his parents at the age of 8. After turning 18, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen and received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating in 1976.

The master of ceremonies was John Molino, acting deputy undersecretary of defense for equal opportunity.

Hispanic American Heritage Month officially ended Oct. 15, but DoD officials decided to hold the department's annual observance here Oct. 16 and 17, in conjunction with the 17th Annual National Conference of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Symposium.