



Energy at Work

In Theresa Alvillar-Speake's ascension to the halls of federal government, timing, opportunity and ganas were everything.

As she puts it, "I always positioned myself to advance my career because I felt I was prepared." It was this strategy that garnered her a position not only in the first Bush administration, but the second one as well.

By Fresia Rodríguez Cadavid

Theresa Alvillar-Speake has overcome many challenges and worked hard for her success. Born to Mexican-American parents in Arizona, during her childhood Alvillar-Speake shuffled between two homes after her parents' divorce. She herself married and divorced at a young age, and by the time she was 25 she was raising her three children single-handedly.

Despite these trials, she persisted in her education and career – and her persistence paid off. Today, as the Director of the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity at the U.S. Department of Energy, she is one of the highest-ranking Latinas in the federal government.

Alvillar-Speake's determination to succeed took root early in her career. As a

student at Fresno City College in 1972, she took a job at the National Economic Development Association (NEDA), a non-profit organization that helped small businesses, of which many were Hispanic-owned. There, she moved up the professional ranks until she became the director.

When the national office closed, Alvillar-Speake's entrepreneurial nature and belief in the organization prompted her to open up NEDA-San Joaquin Valley, a non-profit business development organization. With only one contract to her name, she expanded on her marketing and business skills and secured contracts throughout California. Eventually, NEDA assisted thousands of individuals to achieve their dream of business ownership.

Throughout her tenure at NEDA and her venture with NEDA-San Joaquin Valley, Alvillar-Speake was active in Republican politics. The Republican leadership recognized her skill and potential. In 1983, the California Governor's office called to offer her the position of Deputy Director at the Office of Economic Opportunity. She was later promoted to Director.

Alvillar-Speake's success in the government eventually took her to Washington. In 1991, she worked for President Bush at the U.S. Department of Commerce, serving as Assistant Director

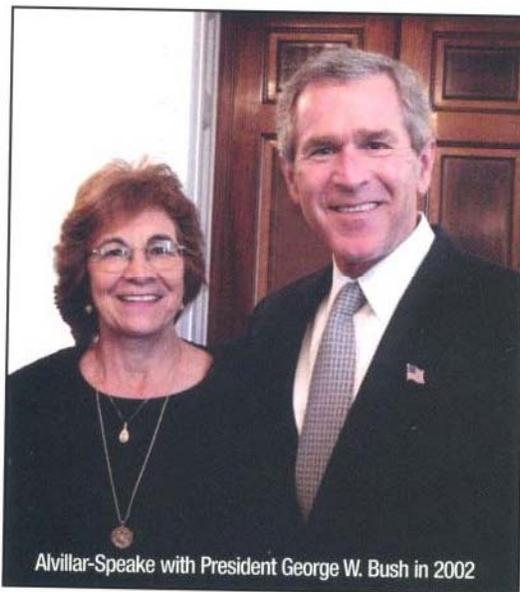
for Program Development at the Minority Business Development Agency. When the administration changed, Alvillar-Speake returned to California. She worked once again at NEDA and later for California Governor Pete Wilson. The election of the second President Bush in 2000 brought her back to Washington, where she assumed her current position.

Under her direction, the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity of the Energy Department ensures fairness and equal opportunity between the federal government and small business partners.

Alvillar-Speake is quick to note her personal and professional commitment to diversity in the workplace: "In many ways, my office is the conscience of the department. All my programs deal with people, inclusion and diversity – making sure that people get a fair shot, whether it's a job or a contract."

The department is responsible for various new initiatives that make it easier for women- and minority-owned small businesses to work with the federal government.

One of these new initiatives is the General Services Administration (GSA) certification technical assistance program.



Alvillar-Speake with President George W. Bush in 2002

In this program, DOE matches up small businesses who meet certain criteria with a consultant who will help them complete the necessary paperwork and submit it to the GSA for certification – for free. This makes the small business's portfolio available for review by federal agencies looking to award a contract for services. Plus, it saves small businesses a significant amount of time and money – up to \$20,000.

Her experience with assisting small businesses helps her understand what kind of help is needed: "We're making that extra effort to try to bring in small businesses because we understand that sometimes technical assistance is not



Alvillar-Speake speaking at the Department of Energy's Veterans Day Ceremony in 2002

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available to them, or they don't know where to get it."

The office has also recently launched small business roundtables nationwide to identify viable small business partners. Since September, they have held three roundtables, educating small businesses on what it takes to partner with the federal government, specifically DOE. In the future, these roundtables will be held quarterly and will draw businesses that can offer a wide array of services.

The Department of Energy is also trying to popularize the Small Business Administration's Mentor and Protégé program. Required by law to certify businesses that can partner with the federal government, the SBA works with federal agencies to provide them with qualified businesses with which they can contract.

In this specific partnership, a small business teams up with a larger business for a prime federal contract. By being a prime contractor, the business builds on its credibility as a federal partner. As Alvillar-Speake explains it, "The SBA's Mentor and Protégé program will benefit minority-owned business because it will open up doors that haven't been opened to these businesses before."

Under her direction, the divisions of Alvillar-Speake's office explore how to best partner with small businesses so that they are ensured a piece of the federal business pie.

The Office of Economic Impact and Diversity is not only committed to business diversification, but also to equal opportunity

in the workplace. In the area of civil rights, there is a Hispanic employment initiative whereby Alvillar-Speake's office is working to increase the number of Hispanic employees. DOE just completed a three-region tour in an attempt to recruit Hispanic university graduates to either intern or work at the agency. To date, they have received four hundred resumes from universities in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico.

This initiative, coupled with the Energy Department's overall diversity initiative, is designed to increase the number of women and individuals from under-represented racial and ethnic groups employed at all levels of the agency. Alvillar-Speake is looking forward to diversifying her workforce: "Most of the minorities that are on board are at the lower levels. We are looking for consideration of a diverse workforce at all levels."

Theresa Alvillar-Speake is a true testament to the enduring work ethic and strength of Latinas. As one of the notable Latina appointees in the Bush administration, she is steadfast and focused in fulfilling her duties. An important quality that she brings to her job is her knowledge and understanding.

Because of her own experiences, she knows how tough it can be for women in the workplace. But her story proves that persistence in the face of difficulty leads to success. As she states, "Women have had the ability to deal with setbacks better than men – women rise to the occasion because we have been tested." 



Energetic Staff

The newest member of Theresa Alvillar-Speake's staff is her Special Assistant, Adrienne L. Cisneros. She was sworn in last October as a Presidential Appointee to the Department of Energy, Office of Economic Impact and Diversity.

"I'm very excited about my new position," states Cisneros. "I intend to support the Department's and President Bush's Small Business Agenda, and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans."

Among her responsibilities are assisting in the Department's economic-impact areas concerning minority businesses, minority educational institutions and Civil Rights. She will also help the Director in supporting diversity within Department of Energy and its contractors. She says, "I look forward to promoting the employment of all minorities, including Hispanic-Americans, at the highest federal levels."

Most recently, Cisneros served as Press Advance for the White House, where she handled national media events.

A native Californian, Cisneros grew up surrounded by politics. She campaigned for local, state and national races long before she could vote. She was involved with the California Young Republicans, and she has served on the board of the National Young Republican Federation.

Cisneros is a member of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly in Virginia, and a Board Member of the National Council of Hispanic Women.

To learn more about the Department of Energy's new small business initiatives, visit their website at <http://www.hr.doe.gov/ed/>.



Theresa Alvillar-Speake, Chief of Staff Frank Beserra, and Special Assistant Adrienne Cisneros