

LATINO LEADERS NETWORK™

MICKEY IBARRA, FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN

**Remarks by:
The Honorable Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series**

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Antonio Villaraigosa: Thank you. I like a short introduction and I'm not giving that speech. Let me ask the Dreamers to come up here with me for a moment. Are they here? They left? Let me say something about them in a moment. We have one, that's great. Come on up. I'm proud of you. I'm Antonio. I said, "What's your name?" and she said, "Dulce." *Que lindo.* Ernesto Garcia, Dulce Matuz, Lorella Praeli, and Gaby Pacheco, you know, I wanted to share their names because you would think with the scapegoating, the mean spirited finger-pointing with the extreme proposals that say that our Dream Act giving people who have lived here most of their lives often times knowing no other country but their own, who want to be here, who want to go to school here, who want to serve in our country and defend our liberties, to many people they're faceless. They're almost not human. To us, they're our future and we love you.

My family will tell you - and I'll introduce them in a moment - that I'm one of those guys that cries at the movies. I grew up in an all-female home, strong mom, my *tia*, and everybody in our family, mostly women my age; the boys came later on. So, you know, we'd always watch the classics and everybody would start crying. But you know, many of you know me, the elected officials here, the people know me for 25 and 30 years. Nobody has ever seen me cry in public. I don't know why. I guess I wasn't watching *The Lion King* in public.

But when the president proposed, when he ordered that we do this deferred action and we give these young people a reprieve to the day that we can pass the Dream Act, to the day that we can pass comprehensive immigration reform -- I was being honored at a dinner, 25 mayors. I believe

Mickey was there, maybe he wasn't. I started talking about the Dreamers and who they are. I started talking about their stories. You know what? I broke down and cried in front of everybody there. I broke down and cried because these people are not only our future, they're the best and the brightest. They're the strongest. They not only have names, they're human beings, and we ought to treat them like that in a great and generous America. And so I thank you for coming up here. I don't want you to stand up the whole time while I'm talking, but I love you. Like many of the people here, I intend to fight for you. I don't mean just fight to get deferred action. I intend to fight until we get a Dream Act, until we get comprehensive immigration reform.

I'm riding in the sunset, I say and I got 9 or 10 months left as mayor. But I knew at 15 what my job was. I want to mention someone who I met at 15. She doesn't remember me back then. I think only remembers me from around the time that I got elected as president of the American Civil Liberties Union and was a union organizer, probably for that. But at 15 years old, I never worked in the fields. I'll be honest; I was a city boy. I didn't speak any Spanish. My mother was born here, my mother Natalia was born here. My grandpa, Pete, came here a hundred years ago from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico. Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico is what that says here, but I remember working at a Safeway and there was a picket line in front of the Safeway on 3rd and Bonnie Brae. There was a picket line in front of the Safeway and they were boycotting grapes. I was working inside of the Safeway. I was feeling like complicit in what they were boycotting against and what they were protesting. Over time I figured out a way, I don't want to be working there anymore because I don't want to be the symbol of the boycott and I joined that picket.

I never worked for the farm workers as some lore said, not true, but I did join the boycott and I was a passionate advocate for those farm workers, even though I never worked in the fields, even though I knew no Spanish, because I knew even at 15 that I had a responsibility to stand up for what was right; to stand up against injustice; to speak up for people who can't often speak for themselves. My leader, the woman on whose shoulders I stand, the woman on whose shoulders all of us stand, is Dolores Huerta. Dolores Huerta, everybody, let's give her a big hand. I'm here today because there was a Dolores Huerta. I'm here today because there was a César Chávez; a farm workers' movement that opened up the country to me, that opened up the country to you.

I want to begin real quickly and say [speaks in Spanish]. We had to serve ourselves. Nobody served us. Get your own plate, put on the food. My sisters would tell you, I always try to put a little more than they did and they'd get me. So I'd like to say thank you to our servers. Give them a big hand everybody, our servers.

I threw away the speech because whenever you're honored, in the way that I've been humbly honored today, you got to say thank you. Let me acknowledge the people in my life that mean more than everything: my son, Antonio; my daughter, Prisila; my daughter, Marisela; and my little apple, my little sunshine, Natalia Fe, named after my mother, my inspiration,

Natalia Fe; my sister, Deborah, the matriarch of our family; my nephew, Aaron; my [speaks in Spanish] my nephew, my other son, Christopher Delgado.

You know, when I hear people talking about family values, nobody has a monopoly on those values. They're neither Democrat nor Republican. Frankly, they're neither uniquely American. We love our families. Our families give us strength. Our families are there when you don't have a big job anymore. When you're no longer the center of attention, when the light's not beaming bright on you, your families are there. They're your inspiration. They're your consolation. They're your rock of support. So I couldn't be prouder to be the chair, and I'll talk about that, but I couldn't be prouder that my kids are here with me today. So, thank you, my kids, my family.

I want to say something because that's what you do when you get up here. You don't give a long, crazy speech, but you do thank. And I am going to give a speech. You thank the people that honor you. Let me start with Mickey. Anybody that knows Mickey here and virtually every delegate, virtually every elected official which is everyone in this room, has been touched by Mickey Ibarra. Mickey Ibarra is one of those people - he's a uniter [sounds like]. I've had a lot of great friendships in this room. Also from time to time, I had some conflict. Mickey's always the guy that goes to this side and that side and brings everybody together. Mickey's always the guy that is promoting our leaders because he understands the role of leadership is to nurture the next generation; that the role of leaders is to bring us together.

I'll tell you. I accepted this, initially told him no. I've been honored before by the Latino Leaders Luncheon; I don't want to do it. He never takes no for an answer, by the way. Finally, I said, okay, but only if I can say something about you. So Mickey, you are an incredible advocate for our community, a leader among leaders, a humble man, a great friend and a brother. You were right to acknowledge Norma because Norma made this event happen. She's a wonderful, wonderful partner to you. You are very lucky to have her. A big hand for Mickey and Norma.

I want to say something about Janet. She's my leader and she knows it. She's right. I am not a shrinking violet when it comes to defending our community, but particularly on this issue of immigration, an issue that I have been involved with at 15, participating in the boycott, leading the walkouts at my high school at Cathedral High School. But it was probably 19 or 20 when I started fighting for immigrants and the undocumented when I began to organize them in power then I worked through them. That's when I started learning a little bit of Spanish. But I'll tell you something. When I'm thinking about where we need to be, what do we need to be thinking about when it comes to civil rights, when it comes to human rights, when it comes to immigration policy, when it comes to so many issues across the board, I go to my friend and leader, to the head of the preeminent Latino civil rights organization in this country; I go to Janet. And to hear from you the kind and generous things that you've said, it makes me proud that I have a friend who's got my back. I really appreciate your leadership as well, Janet Murguia, give her a big hand.

You know, I was listening to Secretary Solis. I'll be honest with you. I was getting upset. She introduced me as her friend and colleague. And I'm saying, friend and colleague? Twenty-five years, we have been in battle after battle after battle in the California legislature. When I was an assembly member, when she was a senator, when I was speaker, she was with me. When I was at 3 percent in the polls, if you were buying stock, my stock was selling for 3 cents a share, she was with me against an incumbent. She was with me for city council against an incumbent. I've been with her in every race, and yes, I was with her when she buried her dad. So when she said, my brother, at the end, she vindicated herself because when she got up here, and said what she did, I love her. I respect her so much. This is a woman with the heart of a lioness. Thank you, *hermanita*.

People expect that our Spanish is going to be *perfecto*. *Que vamos hablar perfectamente la Español por que somos Latinos. Algunos de nosotros emos estado aqui en este pais por tres y cuarto siglos.* [Continues speaking in Spanish] whoever is with him here today, go tell him I said thank you. I just wanted to say I could speak a little Spanish. *Despues de luchad.*

Now that I thanked these people, I want to say something about the people of LA. When I ran for state assembly, I ran in a district where a Latino had never won. It was a civil rights-created district. The outgoing assembly member was about to become a senator. It was a very, very tough race. Sacramento - the establishment was all on the other end. Everybody said it wasn't going to happen because there were multiple candidates and many Latinos and I was running against an Anglo. They said on just the numbers, Antonio, you can't do it. You've got all these people running. You're not going to be able to cross over. The electorate is so polarized. You're not going to be able to do it. I said, why not? I believe in the great generosity of the town I grew up in. I believe the people are good and they're fair. I believe that I can knock on any door and talk to anyone and listen to them, and emote with them, and understand them. So I knocked on those doors and we won. And then we went on, and a few weeks later became majority whip, two years after that, majority leader, and then speaker of the California State Assembly.

I tell people I never could have gotten here. I never forgot that politics was local. I never would have gotten here if I hadn't gotten elected by the people in Boyle Heights; by the people in Highland Park; by the people in El Sereno; by the people in Echo Park and Silver Lake; by the people from Mount Washington and Eagle Rock; by the people that gave me a shot. My neighborhood, the people I've grown up with, the people I had gotten to know. So I always thank them because I think it's important to start with where it all started.

I thank the people of LA, too, because as I said, when Hilda and many of the elected officials who are here from LA - and I want to acknowledge and thank you - they got on board when it was like you're at 3 percent in the polls, he's at 45 percent. Nine percent of the people know you, 72 percent know him. He's been in public life for 25 years. You've been in public life in the city. You've been in public life for six. Hey, brother, it ain't going to happen. Latinos won't get elected to the mayoralty until 2017, they told me because at that time, although we were 44-46 percent of

the city, we were only 22 percent of the electorate. Everybody said it won't happen until 2017 when we'll be about 32 percent of the electorate. I see some of the heads shaking because even then, great friends, they thought, *hay pobrecito, que esta pensando* [continues speaking in Spanish]. And *adelante* we did.

We put together a campaign that LA had not seen since Tom Bradley. It was a campaign of thousands of people. There were people from Texas there and I see one of them right down there. He's talking right now, but he doesn't know. He came from Texas. I think at the time he was a state senator, a House member. There were people from Chicago. There were people from Denver. They camped out. They camped out and they said [speaks in Spanish], we're going to do this. We won in the primary. We lost in the runoff. But we didn't give up. There were 6,000 people on Election Day and I knew then that it wasn't about me. It's never been about that. It's about us. It's about our aspirations. It's about who we are. Therefore, two years later, speaking of [speaks in Spanish], I said [speaks in Spanish] everybody used to say, Antonio, you're going to be mayor. Go make some money. Stay out eight years. You'll be elected mayor one day, just wait. And I was out for two years. I started realizing another [speaks in Spanish]. I don't want to say it. Gut feel, *mamí*.

That means love from afar is a stupid love. So I decided I better run again. And we ran. We ran against an incumbent who at the time had 69 percent approval rating. We won for the first time in LA history in the primary beating the incumbent. Then a year later thinking I wasn't going to run, I went to the Boston Democratic Convention. I came back excited. I said, you know what, I'm going to do it. I'm going to give it a try. Everybody around the table of 16 people, everybody said no, please don't do it. They said you should wait. I said I really appreciate it when one person, two persons, three persons, 16, and I said, you know what? We're going to do it. Every one of them - praise God and thanks for their friendship - all jumped in. Now, it's been seven years.

As I leave this job, focused on my job as mayor, wanting to finish everything we started. I'm not going to go through what we started, but anybody in LA knows what a difference we've made. We made, not me, my staff, my colleagues, the legislature helping out, the Congress members helping out, all of the folks who have done this together. I believe and believe strongly that in this last year, helping to reelect President Obama has to be our mission. Why is that? I love the pundits and the haters. They love to say, oh, Villaraigosa was with Hillary in the primary, and he was crisscrossing the country. Now, he's trying to look for a job. Come on. It's the hate thing, you know.

I'm with President Obama because it matters to Los Angeles who's in the White House. I'm with President Obama because at the worst time in history when you look at our economy, when you saw that we were losing 800,000 jobs the month before, 3.5 million jobs in the six months before he took office, this president in the worst financial crisis since the 1930s took it head on. He reached across the aisle. He tried to work with the other side. He did everything he could. And what's happened since then? Twenty-nine straight consecutive months of growth in job creation, private

sector job creation, the first time since the early 1990s - since the early 1990s - that we're actually growing manufacturing jobs. What has he done? Let me answer the question. Are we better off today than we were four years ago? Absolutely, yes. Is there enthusiasm in this room? Yes. Why? Not only did he help to create through his policies 4.5 million jobs, not only are we growing this economy, but, you know, 32 million people have healthcare because of him. They're better off. [Speaks in Spanish] 9 million of the 32 million are Latinos. They're better off. Ask the 150,000 kids who got student loans because of his policy. They're better off. Ask the Dreamers if they're better off. The Dreamers are better off.

When you look at this president, when you look at what he stands for, and I'll end with this. My grandpa came from Leon, Guanajuato a hundred years ago. He came with the shirt on his back. He worked in the fields. He had nothing. He built a small business in the teens [sounds like]. A Mexicano with a second or third grade education, I don't know exactly, second, third education, whatever. A Mexicano with no education in the 1920s, building a business like that. By the 1930s, my mother was in the best Catholic boarding school in Los Angeles. Mother spoke five languages. My mother was a brilliant woman. He loses all his money in the Depression. He had a younger wife. She left him. He had two daughters. He's working day and night. He puts them in a foster home. He visits them on the weekend. He puts them in Catholic school so they could get a good education. This was the greatest generation. They were Mexicanos that were part of the greatest generation. They sacrificed during the Depression, during World War II so that we would have a better life.

The opportunity of America that we believe in is the opportunity of America that gave us the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. President Obama understands that as well as anyone. My grandfather left Mexico because Mexico was a place of rich and poor. Today they have 53 percent of their people in the middle class, but back then it was rich and poor. He wanted to go to a country where you could start at the bottom and go to the top. He wanted to go to a country where you reward work. He wanted to go to a country where even during the time of a virulent discrimination you could start up your own business and make it.

We believe in that country too. And so at this convention, everybody, this convention is a convention that's going to make crystal clear the two roads ahead. You know, there are really two roads ahead. There could be a third road, but they've gone so far to the right that there are two roads ahead. President Obama according to Moody's Analytics, not the president, not the Democrats, Moody's Analytics is saying that if we stay the course and follow his plan to cut \$4 trillion out of our deficit, but to do it in a way that doesn't raise taxes on the middle class that invest in small business when they want to create jobs. It doesn't extend the Bush tax cuts to the top 2 percent. By the way, all the talk about that, taxing the rich, we're just putting them back to where we were during the Clinton years. When we took Bush 41's failed policies of deficits to record surpluses and 23 million jobs, you take that path forward, it's a path that's not going to decimate education.

Everybody here, *sus trajes*, you guys are looking good. You come in here wearing your suits. You went to Harvard, in Yale - Joaquin Castro - don't we love him, our keynote speaker? Aren't we proud of him? Stanford and Harvard -- we went to UCLA. I tell people when they tell me I went in because I was so smart, I say, no, no, no. I went in because there was an affirmative action program. I went in because there was a Voting Rights Act. I became mayor because they opened up the country to me. That's the country that Barack Obama wants. That's the country we believe in.

So yes, I'm honored to be mayor. I'm honored to be the chair, but I'm most honored to serve you. And so I want to thank you. I want to say that this has been a ride like no other. But I also want to say this. I don't think you have to be in public life to serve your community. I don't think you have to be in public life to advocate for what's right. I think you can do that in many different ways. I know that the people here, all of you who are here, both Latino and non-Latino, are here because you care, because you understand that this is a growing, vibrant, important community to the future of our nation. So I thank you. It is indeed an honor. I hope you have a great convention. Those of you who head organizations, come back to LA, have your convention there. We need your money. We love you. *Gracias a todos*. Thank you very much. It's a real honor.

[End of transcript]