



**Latino Leaders Network
Mayor Ron Nirenberg
Wednesday - January 19, 2022**

Ron Nirenberg: Good evening. Good evening. Thank you very much, Antonio. Thank you all very much. Please go back to your dessert. Thank you to Mickey who has a legacy of bringing people together. It's truly an honor to be here, Mickey. And thank you, Leticia, for that warm introduction. Though it is a tribute to mayors tonight, I hope we can get a round of applause in acknowledging what an incredible leader Leticia Van de Putte is herself, and what she's meant to so many Latinas and women across the State of Texas and the nation.

Jackie, congratulations. It's an honor to share the stage with you. I truly enjoyed your energy up here and your spirit.

Antonio, it's a privilege to be introduced by Leticia. A true friend and mentor. What an absolute honor it is to be the recipient of the Antonio Villaraigosa Leadership Award. Thank you to Mickey Ibarra and the entire Latino Leaders Board for hosting tonight's event.

Earlier we heard from U.S. Conference of Mayors President, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, who I want to acknowledge and thank for his efforts to combat historic redlining in his native city. Similar to Miami, San Antonio has struggled with socioeconomic segregation. A horrific symptom of decades of neglect that has disproportionately affected our Latino communities and created blatant race-based housing disparities. Like our newly elected conference president, I'm looking forward, as you are, to more complete communities that celebrate our diversity and unify our unique cultures.

But first, to combat redlining, you have to keep folks housed which is proven a difficult challenge for all of us in this room and especially for America's mayors during this pandemic. When I was first elected mayor in 2017, I formed a task force with a singular mission - to develop with community a comprehensive and compassionate housing policy so that all San Antonians, regardless of income and circumstance, can live with dignity. I'm incredibly proud of that work. It's

vital in any year, but it was particularly important in providing the platform for our community's lifeline during this pandemic.

A COVID-19 emergency housing assistance program, which you heard, has helped now over 55,000 households in our community pay their rent, mortgage, utility bills, and ultimately avoid

eviction. So let me acknowledge the work of the Biden Administration in particular and with the support of the cabinet, with members of the administration, Secretary Fudge, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and our local nonprofit housing partners.

I'm proud to announce that San Antonio is one of the first cities to meet our five-month House America goal of rehousing over 530 previously homeless residents in the midst of this pandemic. We're well on our way to meeting our overall goal of 1,500, getting folks off the streets into safe housing. And for the first time in San Antonio's history, we will be sending a housing bond to our voters this spring that reprioritizes rehabilitation and preservation of existing housing stock for both renters and owners, along with permanent supportive housing for our homeless residents.

So let me pause a minute and do what we all should do and recognize and thank last year's honoree, Mayor Romero, for her remarks this evening. Her story is an important one for all of us, but it's one that hits home for me. Many of you may not know this, but the migrant farmworker's story is very important in my family, in my household. My wife Erica and I want to make sure that our son Jonah is raised to understand and appreciate what she endured through her childhood, the labor, the people that built and continue to sustain this country.

America is a confluence of cultures and a confluence of immigrants. A place where little *Tejana* can spend her summers traveling the Midwest to pick strawberries, onions, and tomatoes with her family and now lead research for one of the nation's most successful grocery companies. A place where this Jewish Catholic Asian-American grad student can marry the love of his life and raise a Latino son in the heart of South Texas. And it's a privilege to join a cohort of mayors that have such diverse backgrounds but a shared understanding of the struggles our communities face each and every day.

Many of you, if you close your eyes and you think of the COVID-19 pandemic, will see the photos of San Antonio's food lines during the pandemic which highlighted the inequities faced by our neighbors through one of the worst health and economic disasters this nation has ever endured. That's also the story of America - a place where, despite some of the best economic times in a generation, tens of thousands of San Antonio families, millions of American families were one event away from the brink. One event away from needing our food banks to feed their children. The COVID-19 pandemic became that event for all of them.

It was so clear to us then, and it's still what keeps me up at night, and it is our collective challenge moving forward. We cannot let ourselves forget those images. We cannot go back to

the way things were. Like every mayor and elected official in this room, I believe in my city, I believe in my residents. But in San Antonio's case, I believe firmly that the inequalities didn't appear overnight, didn't happen on their own, and certainly weren't caused by the pandemic. We had not provided our people enough opportunities to thrive in their own homes.

So in the summer of 2020, in the height of the pandemic, we rededicated ourselves to breaking cycles of generational poverty through workforce development and education; to train San Antonians for higher paying in-demand jobs, ones that could sustain their entire families. Economic opportunity, economic mobility *is* the American dream. We won't let it get extinguished.

I was criticized heavily for calling an election to dedicate a portion of sales tax to workforce development and college degree completion in the middle of a pandemic, but I saw a rare opportunity to invest in our people without tax increase and without additional fees. Ultimately, as you heard from Senator Van de Putte, 77 percent of San Antonio voters approved the proposition delivering a clear victory that will allow us to invest nearly \$200 million over the next four years to drastically alter the trajectory of tens of thousands of San Antonio's working families.

Leveraging federal dollars, we've already begun a pilot initiative that has helped 9,500 residents through the intake process and enrolled over 4,500 in training programs and allowed hundreds to start work in higher paying healthcare, manufacturing, construction, trades, I.T., and business administration careers. Perhaps most importantly a vast majority of our programs' participants are women of color living at or below the poverty line, the demographic most impacted by this pandemic in any city that you're in.

As mayors, we are best positioned to address the unique needs of our city. Throughout this public health crisis, we have routinely advocated for the authority and flexibility to implement local measures with the utmost care which is why I'm thrilled to be joined by Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer who has been instrumental in helping our nation's cities shape policy through compassion. Thank you, Greg.

But as a mayor of the largest Hispanic majority city in the nation, I'm especially proud to be honored with a tribute whose namesake is considered one of our nation's most prominent Latino voices. So, Antonio, thank you for everything you've done to lift up Latino leaders and those who lead Latino cities throughout our nation. That is because America's mayors recognize that with the American Rescue Plan, the recently passed bipartisan infrastructure law, and the enormous potential

with the Build Back Better agenda coupled with our own innovative, local initiatives, we have a once in a generation opportunity to invest in both the physical and human infrastructure that is certain to make our communities as we have stated and dreamt and promised more resilient, more sustainable, and more equitable.

When city halls across the nation see their fair share of politics, the people in this room can agree that it's not Republican work. It's not Democratic work. It's a mayor's work. It's American work. I'm grateful to work alongside a coalition of mayors who have come together in an unprecedented crisis to address our nation's most urgent needs.

So I'd like to thank again, the local elected officials in this room and around the country for being constant in a time filled with seemingly never ending streams of unknowns. But through those unknowns and the uncertainties - and let me do a shout out to our great friends in Texas who are by our sides every day - one thing is sure: America's mayors will continue to work for you. Thank you again. Enjoy the evening.

And, Mickey, may I have a point of personal privilege. I want to thank Angie because she evoked a great San Antonian, Henry Gonzalez, our former congressman. Rest his soul. Someone who we still see as one of our foremost leaders in San Antonio. My first meeting I ever had in my office as a newly elected city

council member was with Charlie. Charlie handed me a card and I took it. I laminated it so I can have it in my wallet at all times. I take it out when the occasion strikes, and it struck me tonight. I want to read you what's on this card that Charlie gave me. It has Henry's image on it.

It says: In my time, I've had the honor to be vilified for standing up against segregation. I've had the privilege of being a thorn in the side of unprincipled privilege and the great joy of being demonized by entrenched special interests. What I care about is what you care about - decency, justice, an abhorrence for what is wrong and intolerance for mediocrity. I am an American without prefix, suffix, apology, or any other kind of modification. I never believe that the way to win equality is through separation.

Thank you, Angie, for calling Henry's name. God bless you all. Have a great evening.