



**Remarks by
Nadia Velazquez
Latino Leaders Network
Eagle Leadership Award**

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Nydia Velázquez: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you. And thank you, Loraine [phonetic], for that kind introduction.

I hate these kinds of things. I really do. You know, this is my job and this is what I love to do. It is my community. It is the people that I represent. It's all those beautiful children and their faces that give meaning to the work I do in Washington. So, to all of you, thank you for the privilege, the opportunity that you have given me in serving my community at large, the Latino community in this country for the last two years. And it has been a great run. I really enjoyed it. You didn't see any articles in the papers, [indiscernible] Politico, about bochinches. We cut that off from the very same day and I said, "You know, we know that we have a White House that will be

working with us. We know that we have the majority in both Houses, and we do know that we are facing the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. So, we don't have much time for bochinches or gossip of personalities here. We have a lot of challenges: high foreclosure, the housing crisis, the unemployment rate that is hitting us so hard like any other community."

So, like all great things in life, everything we've done in the last two years has been a collaborative effort. And I owe thanks to our taskforce chairs of the CHC, Rubén Hinojosa, Charlie Gonzales, and all the great men and women that serve in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. To the CHCI board, thank you so much for all the hard work during the last two years and the great accomplishments that we were able to get done. And to all of you, from Janet Murguia to Loraine to [indiscernible], to so many that I called when I was down or whenever I had good news and you were there listening, ready to give advice or join forces.

And so, let me just take this moment to say that if anything, I honor my father and my mother, because believe me, growing up in rural barrio [speaking in foreign language] Yabucoa, when things were really tough, nine children, but my father and mother never walked away even in the most difficult moments when sometimes we were given -- we cried because we were

hungry at night and my mother said, "Don't worry." I said, "Mommy, I want soda," and she will go and make sugar and water and give it to us with some lemon. So, they were relentless and they understood their commitment to give to us a better life, a better future, and they instilled in me the value of education. And that taught me that if anything, once I'm gone and we are all, I don't know, go to something else and do something else in life, that commitment, that is the best legacy that we can leave to our young generations. And so, from --

And Loraine mentioned it, from a young age I saw how political action can benefit people's lives. Some of my earliest memories involve talking politics at the dinner table, going to political rallies with my father, or listening to him giving a speech in a flatbed truck. But you know what, it was in New York when I came at the age of 19 to work on my master's degree at the New York University and I was able to come to New York because the government of Puerto Rico gave me a full scholarship. So, I do know that there is a role for government to play to help those most vulnerable, and I will always, always fight for that.

So, you know, I came to D.C., I wasn't supposed to be here, I was supposed to be a number, a school dropout or something else, but I wasn't. And since I came to Washington, I decided, I don't know why but I guess because I saw my father struggling

to understand rules and regulations when he opened up his little brick -- una fabrica de cemento de bloques -- and he couldn't understand, and I was there, a sixth grader trying to interpret for him from the Spanish language in Spanish regulations that at an early age, what the heck I was reading, I didn't understand, but it was difficult for my father. So, when I came here, I knew that the most important thing to be able to provide for my community were jobs, and still today that is our biggest challenge. We know that.

So, I decided that I wanted to serve in the small business committee. And then, I said, "Where is the money, financial services? I'm going to go and I'm going to ask for financial services." And I am proud of the work that I've done as chair of the small business committee especially making sure that the tools are there to help Latinos and minority expand economic opportunities. And if there is any accomplishment, at least I can tell you that every time an agency cabinet hires a contracting officer, they call me up and let me know that they did because they know that I'm watching to see if they are accomplishing their contracting goals for small businesses and minority businesses.

Look, guys. I have flown on Air Force One with multiple presidents and taught a secretary of state how to dance tango, and now I have had the privilege of chairing the Congressional

Hispanic Caucus and the CHCI. Not bad. Not bad for the kid from the barrio of the Yabucoa.

So, I know something about starting with little and using education to find your way in life, which is why it has been so important to me and a privilege to lead the CHCI, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, which helps young people pursue their dreams. As the Hispanic community's role in the U.S. grows, CHC and CHCI will continue working to ensure that Latinos claim their place in the American narrative.

By 2013, there will be 75 million Hispanic Americans. That is 25 percent of the population. Hispanic entrepreneurship is growing three times faster than any other groups, and Latinos' buying power is approaching almost \$1 trillion. My friends, if that is not power, what is? So, we are becoming an ever more politically robust force.

Turn out among Hispanics reach record levels in 2008. This year, during an otherwise very bad election for Democrats, Hispanic voters made the difference in returning Leader Reid and Senator Boxer and Bennett to Congress and retaining the Senate. And walking into 2012, my friends, and I hope that Senator Reid is listening and all those potential presidential candidates, you just can't win without at least getting 40 percent or 45 percent of Latino voters in this country.

When Sonia Sotomayor became the first Latina Supreme Court Justice, young Latinas and Latinos were immediately provided a new source of inspiration. If we are to capitalize on these strengths, there must be additional opportunities for the next generation of Latino leaders. CHCI's mission is to make sure that these young people can achieve their goals.

In the last two years, we have been changing the face of the federal government here in Washington, we have been changing the makeup of the committees in the Senate and the House, and we have been changing the workforce's face throughout Washington. So, we double the students that we are serving to 1500 students, we double the number of Congressional interns and double the number of ready-to-lead high school students. The CHCI has awarded 150 scholarships in 2010, the most ever. And you haven't -- well, and I'm not going to say this, but everything you read about our internship program and fellowship program is good, nothing bad has been written about these programs in the press. So, we are very proud of that.

So, it is CHC's job to ensure Latino voices are heard on policy matters, and today we are making our presence felt on every issue, big and small. I'm proud to say that there are historic numbers of Latino appointments in the new administration, and this wasn't done because of the work of CHC.

This was done in collaboration with the community-based organizations and Latino leaders that are here today.

We fought with all of you to ensure everyone is counted in the census. The CHC worked to boost the size of Pell grants. The caucus helped pass healthcare reform legislation including \$2.55 billion for minority-serving institutions and \$1 billion for Hispanic-serving institutions, and we changed the face of the U.S. Supreme Court forever.

My friends, the political math may have changed in Washington, but one thing will remain constant -- our commitment to justice, and we will not rest in fighting to make sure that we do what the American public is telling us to do. They are ahead of policymakers in Washington and political pundits. They want to reform the broken system that we call immigration and we have to do it.

Today, this morning, I had a meeting with Speaker Pelosi, and now I'm walking out to go and meet with President Barack Obama. And hopefully, in the week of November 29th, we will be taking a vote on the House of Representative for the first time on the DREAM Act.

And this is not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy. We want a standalone bill without add jobs or H-1 visa, because we cannot lose our leverage to bring about comprehensive immigration reform. If we attach any of those elements into

this DREAM Act, 10 million undocumented will continue to live in the shadows for years to come. So, I am not telling you that this is going to happen, that we are 100 percent there. I'm coming to you to say we need each one of you to be here next week or the following week before we come back in session because next week we're not going to be here, we have to be sending e-mails and faxing letters and telephone calls and visiting new members, especially those moderate Democrats. We've got to tell them that if Costa in California wins, he's going to win because of a Latino vote. And so, moderate Democrats, they owe us and in many instances we were the deciding factor in their re-election, and they need to learn that lesson. And we will not -- [speaks in Spanish].

But we need all of you, all of you. This is in a matter of two weeks. It's in a matter of two weeks. The window of opportunity is very small. And so, we don't have the high price lobbyists but we have you, the community, and those dreamers, they have us, they are relying on us. So, leave everything you have to do in the next two weeks and get yourself out there and make phone calls and visit those members and remind them that we will not forget who was there for us. [Speaks in Spanish].