



Eagle Leadership Award
Keynote Remarks of Gloria Molina
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Gloria Molina: I have attended other luncheons, and I'm very proud to be part of today's luncheon. And of course, I have to thank Hilda Solis. What a beautiful introduction and tribute. My parents would be very, very proud. Gracias, Hilda. It's good to have a good friend in power. That's wonderful.

Well, my father used to say *con un sueño trabaja trabajo y ganas todos se puede lograr*. With a dream, hard work, and determination anything can be accomplished. One would think, with such positive inspiration, that it had all been planned. That I would one day be here and all of that I would have known as a child. But nothing could be further from the truth.

My parents are from Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. I'm first generation. Although my father was born in the U.S, he was

raised at the age of three in Mexico and of course always longed to come back to the United States.

I'm the oldest of ten children. I was raised in LA. We all lived together in a small two-bedroom house. And of course, I was always reminded that it was my responsibility to set the example for my brothers and sisters. This is the tradition in Mexico, and I was very proud to follow through on that tradition.

My parents had dreams for each and every one of us, but those dreams were really rather limited. My father aspired for me to graduate from high school and to go on to be a legal secretary. That would make him so very proud. He wanted all of his children to learn English and to not have an accent, that was very important to him because he didn't want us to be discriminated, and of course for every single one of them to graduate from high school.

He'd been a construction worker all of his life. As he said, he worked with his back and his hands. Very frankly he did not want us to follow in that tradition, but tradition was part and parcel of my growing up. Certainly, my brother was expected to become a lawyer or a professional. The girls were expected to become teachers, secretaries, and moms.

But of course, my dreams were much larger than that. They weren't political at all. It was my intention to become a

fashion designer believe it or not. After two art classes I clearly decided, and I think it was decided for me, that I had no talent in that area whatsoever. So I decided to start college with an interest in social work.

It's interesting that my mother was very bothered by my wanting to attend college. After all she'd only attended the third grade. She felt that for my future graduating from high school was more than enough. After all I was to become a wife and a mother. She was also bothered by the fact that of course my father had had an industrial accident. He had been in a cave-in, and we were living on a disability check. Of course, another fine Mexican tradition is that the oldest has to be responsible for the well-being of the family as well. So, an additional paycheck was necessary. Consequently, I had to go out and work.

But I attended college while working fulltime as a legal secretary. I was involved in all kinds of issues in the community. One of the things I decided to do was to volunteer at a local community center on the Eastside. I started working with young women, 10th graders, who unfortunately couldn't read at a 10th grade level. It bothered me tremendously. So, I went to go visit the teachers at the high school.

I was confronted by a group of teachers who said: Don't worry about these girls, after all they're not going to graduate

from high school. They'll probably get pregnant before then, so we don't expect them to graduate. So, if I were you, I wouldn't worry about them.

Well, that certainly got my adrenaline going, and it hasn't stopped since. At the same time on the Eastside, the Chicano Movement had all of its beginnings at college. All of us were members of MASA, the Mexican American Student Association. This was when it was okay to be a hyphenated American. And of course, MEChA followed soon thereafter. The Chicano Movement was so exhilarating to me. Listening to Chicano activists talk about what we needed to do about the inequities, the injustices, it was wonderful. I joined up as quickly as I could. I was a wonderful follower.

Unfortunately, the women who were part of that organization were relegated to the task of mimeographing and making menudo for all of the fundraisers. Of course, every time we wanted to raise our issues and we had many - they were employment training, they were the issues of childcare, they were the issues of higher education - we of course were quickly castigated and put in our place.

I participated in various events with all of them. But anytime we would raise our issues, we were of course accused of trying to divide the movement. Well, at the same time, as we all know, I attended various consciousness-raising

meetings. That's what they were called back then in the infancy of our present feminist movement. I listened to all of these white women talk about these macho men who were discriminating against them, who were relegating them to these subservient roles.

It was a real problem for me to listen to that because growing up, my father was very proud to be a macho. A macho in Mexico is a proud tradition. It is someone who is a responsible respected man, someone who takes responsibility for his family. It's a very honorable role. Then using that word was a real problem for me, and so it was a real tough situation.

I certainly was a victim of the racism that was going on in the community, but I was also a victim of the sexism that was going on in the community. But certainly, the issues - that is the war in Vietnam, and the fact that our Chicanos were going to the frontlines, and we were losing many, many more than we represented in this country as far as population - I decided very quickly that this was going to be my focus.

So, I got involved in the Chicano Movement, and every day I was working on those issues while I was working full time. But at the same time, I quietly - I wasn't a very engaging person at the time, not leader of any sort - I participated in various discussions with other Latinas and other Chicanas in the

community. We certainly felt the discrimination. We certainly felt a barrier of our inability to move forward.

So, we started talking about putting together an organization, a network, where we could become those kinds of advocates. I came across the opening of the Chicana Service Action Center by a group of very, very assertive women. Francisca Flores who was an activist in the labor movement in the '40s and '50s. Lilia Aceves and various other women who had decided to open up an employment training and counseling facility.

I was very glad to finally find this network of women. They convinced me, and we joined up with them. They said that we should form a chapter of an organization known as Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, a national Chicana advocate group, and we thought absolutely. We developed a chapter as quickly as we could in Los Angeles later to only find out that the organization only existed in paper. There was no such organization. But our very first meeting attracted over 200 Chicanas.

We clearly understood the importance that the dialogue that we were having with ourselves was going on everywhere and that Chicanas needed to have a network, an organization, and someone to advocate on their behalf. So, we got into the action as quickly as possible. We started building our leadership skills

by speaking in front of people many times. Certainly not prepared, but we were learning our way through. We were writing proposals to develop various programs for women. We were writing articles about many of the issues in our community and we were moving forward with a very strong action plan.

We developed of course more employment training programs. We developed supportive services for Latinas, and Chicanas, and their families. A woman can't go to work if she doesn't have good childcare services, so we developed the very first bilingual bicultural childcare center. We also went as far as to sue LA County, who I now serve on that board of supervisors, against the forced sterilization of Mexican women at their county general hospital.

We had a very, very active plan. We were very excited about the work that we were doing and of course that led to getting involved in the political process. Certainly, it wasn't what we were planning on doing. But by nature of getting involved in many of those issues, you become part of the political process.

I became very adept and developed an army of what I call the lickers and the stickers. We were a very valuable commodity to most of the grassroots campaign for the Chicanos that were running for office. So, every time one of them decided to run, they called on me. I put together a whole group of people and

became a very, very valuable commodity, as I said, to any of those campaigns. And so, I was a regular.

Eventually, I got an opportunity to work for the newly elected Assemblyman Art Torres. At that time, it was called an administrative assistant. I really welcomed the opportunity to now work in the community on many of the issues. It was just exhilarating to be a part of not only his campaign but eventually of his staff.

But I wanted to learn much more about political organizing. So of course, I asked for an opportunity to hopefully work on the then Carter-Mondale campaign that was coming through the Eastside in LA. Instead, I became the, quote, "Chicana" in the California campaign. You know you only have one at that time. You can't have too many. So, I was sent up and down the state to organize for the Carter-Mondale campaign. Unfortunately, most of the Chicanos didn't know who Jimmy Carter was and, in many instances, didn't have the interest.

But luckily, while we didn't win the state of California, we did win the White House. At that time I was called by a very dear friend of mine now, and that is Rick Hernandez. He had been at the Western Region desk and later became a muckety muck at the Small Business Administration. Right, Rick? He called on me and said why don't you apply for this job at the White

House. I thought, wow, what an exciting opportunity to go to the White House and be with all of these White House politicians that know what's going on and how to do it. I could learn so very much. So I certainly was excited. It was so very impressive, and I was so fortunate.

Well, on my very first day on the job I received an envelope on my desk. It had two little flags on it. It had an American flag and a flag of Iran. We were invited to join Jimmy Carter on the White House lawn to welcome the Shah of Iran, so I was very excited. My first time on the White House lawn. I went out there.

Now, I have been involved in the Chicano moratorium in East LA. I was involved in the school walkouts on the Eastside. I had been part of antiwar protests throughout LA. I had been involved in feminist protests, but I never expected to be gassed on the lawn of the White House. Which was exactly what happened that day. It seems as many of the people who were against the Shah were creating quite a stir right outside of the White House. So that was what happened to me on my first day.

That evening as I walked out, the White House police said we need to walk all Persians to their car. I said, Persian? I'm not a Persian. I'm a Mexican. And they said, oh, from Mexico? And I said, no, from East LA. Of course, it was very

clear that we were non-existent to many of the people here in D.C.

Well, at that time we were fortunate to have a few members of Congress. Like Congressman Ed Roybal and our very own Congressman Robert Garcia. Very few people were there who were not able to really fight all of the inequities that so many of us knew were going on in our community. I knew that at that time I needed to go back home and find a way that we could get more Latinos elected to the U.S. Congress.

It was interesting because I was working in the Office of Presidential Personnel and, quote, my responsibility was to - again quote - "get Hispanics appointed to commissions." Not the top commissions, by the way. Those little, smaller commissions. Make sure you only put one on. Okay? That was my role at that time. I enjoyed the work. It was wonderful work, but clearly, I needed to go home. We needed to go home and be part of organizing in our own community to make sure that we had a stronger and better presence here in the Beltway. And that was the very important part.

So, when I returned to Los Angeles I started working, at that time fulltime, for then Speaker Willie Brown. Then again, I also volunteered. I was a volunteer for everything. I worked for a group or volunteered for a group called Californios. It was a reapportionment committee that was operating in Los

Angeles. We knew, because of the growth of the Chicano population throughout California, that we were entitled to two additional congressional seats in California, and we were very excited. So of course, many of my feminist friends thought why not. One should go to a Chicano and one should go to a Chicana if we're going to be fair about this whole process.

So of course, we approached many of those Chicano-elected officials that we had supported all of this time. We walked in and made our request that we thought we should have one of the seats in Congress. Well, of course we were laughed right out of the room. What was interesting about it was that we had approached various Chicana lawyers because we wanted, and we thought that would be the most qualified individual to run. Well, they laughed at us as well. They said it was tough enough to get a Chicano elected, let alone a Chicana.

Well, we went away. We licked our wounds. Luckily for us, there was an opportunity that turned up in my own backyard. That is that Assemblyman Torres decided to challenge one of his Senate colleagues. He was going to run for that seat and that vacated that assembly seat. So again, we went to the various Chicana lawyers. They said, uh-uh, we don't have a chance of winning and we're not going to run for that seat.

So at the end of the day, it was very clearly decided that I had to be the candidate. I knew the district. I had worked

in the district. I knew enough about politics. So, I decided to do it. We had to take it forward and move forward and take the risk. We weren't sure we were going to win, but we were going to do all that we could.

Well, I was very fortunate. We were able to raise money. We got into an action plan. We had a campaign going. It was very fortunate for me to be the oldest of ten. When you're walking the district, having nine brothers and sisters with you is a help. We walked that district one-and-one-half times. So I was very fortunate that in 1982 I was the first Chicana ever elected to the California State Legislature. I'm very proud of that.

I'm very proud to say that what my mother said to me many, many years before that about setting the example for others served me well because since then I have been followed into the California legislature by some of the most talented and wonderful women that you will ever meet. So, I'm very proud to have been the very first one. But many followed, like our wonderful Congresswoman Hilda Solis, into the legislature.

In 1987, I decided to run for the city council. I should mention to you, by the way, when I first decided to run for that assembly seat, you'd think I would have walked into the room with those same guys. When I decided to run for that seat, that they would have said, oh sure, Gloria. Instead, they said no.

They already had a candidate in mind. So, we had to run against them. We decided to do so, and I had to do it, and they still didn't believe that we could win.

Well, would you believe, after winning the state legislative seat and deciding to run for the city council, I went back to those politicos and said, look, I want to run for the city council. And they said, oh, no, we got our own candidate. So, they didn't support me back then either, but I had to beat them again. So, in 1987 I became the first Chicana on the Los Angeles City Council, which was very important to us.

Of course, we continued in our battle. And because of a reapportionment fight, that MALDEF, an organization that I'm very proud of and I happen to serve on their board, was able to fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court because we had five white men representing the County of Los Angeles. A very powerful position from the standpoint of what it does and what it's responsible for. Five people represent 10 million people.

Our budget this year is over \$22 billion. It has a tremendous amount of responsibility. But the way they had drawn the lines was very clever and certainly didn't allow for any minority to serve even though we had a large Latino population and a very, very large African American population.

So, after our challenge in the Supreme Court and our success, there was a seat in the first district that was for the most part carved out to be a Latino district. I with ten other candidates, including unfortunately my former boss Art Torres, ran for that seat. I was lucky that in 1991 I was elected as the first Chicana to the County Board of Supervisors, a position that I serve in today, and I'm very proud to carry out that work.

When Congressman Roybal was ready to retire, he came to me and said I'd like you to run for my seat. Very frankly I was very happy doing the work that I was doing. By that time, I'd been married and had a child. But we were very fortunate to have Lucille Roybal-Allard, who had followed me into the California legislature, ready to go. So, she was able to follow through, and serve, and follow the footsteps of her father. Lucille is a wonderful congresswoman. I love her dearly. One of our great leaders. I'm so proud that she has been one of the Latinas that has been motivated to get involved in the political process.

So, we had been wanting from day one to get a Chicana in the U.S. Congress. By the time that Lucille got here, there were others and unfortunately still not enough. We have to do much more work to elect many more Latinas to the U.S. Congress. But, you know, I'm elated with the number of women that I see in

positions of power in organizations like Janet and so many others that are heading up in corporate positions on major foundations. I am very proud to see so many Chicanas in positions of power. It's wonderful. I am glad that I am but one of many who continue to struggle and take on risks to carry on these kinds of roles.

By the way, I want you to know that while my mother had a real problem in my attending college, she saved most of her life so that her youngest - the 9th and 10th, they're twins - would be able to go to college without ever having to work. She was so proud that day when they graduated with their degrees. I'm so glad that my mother realized how important it was for all of us to go to college. I was very proud of her that day as well.

But the reality is we have so much more to do. We need to continue to champion so that every single day we will realize that it requires both of us to be at the table. Both of our men as well as our women. When it comes to public policy, it can't be one or the other. We need to continue to have that kind of unity when it comes to the issues of public policy.

I'm looking forward, like everyone else, to new administration. I wore a pantsuit in honor of my candidate, but I look forward to being a part of the Democratic campaign to win the White House back. But I do know that whoever goes into the White House will have to go through the Latino community to get

there. That hopefully they're going to recognize and understand the unbelievable talent that we have in our community and will appoint Chicanas and Latinas to positions such as secretaries of State, Supreme Court justices, and even vice presidents. Who knows.

We are making our community better and stronger every single day. So, it's wonderful to be a first, but it would mean nothing if we did not have a following of so many people like you. An honor to join with all of you. We still have so much more work to do. *Muchísimas gracias.*