

LATINO LEADERS NETWORK™

MICKEY IBARRA, FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN

**Remarks by:
Remarks by Dr. Juan Andrade Jr.
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series**

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Juan Andrade: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all very much. Thank you all very much. Yes, find a place for my hat there. Thank you all very much.

You all probably hear me say "y'all" from time to time because as you all can probably tell, I'm not originally from Chicago. And people wonder, "You know, because you Texans say y'all this and y'all that, what do you say when you mean everybody?" Well, you know, it's very simple. When we mean everybody, we just say, "All, y'all." So, thank all y'all for that. And Congressman, thank you so much.

Luis Gutiérrez: You're welcome.

Juan Andrade: You know, it is said that gratitude is the most powerful human emotion, and I think that that speaks for many of us who are grateful for people like Mickey for doing what he continues to do and always lifting up our community, and over the last 10 years, selecting someone that he wants to lift up, that he believes that deserves a place and a time at the podium to share his or her story, because as Mickey said a while ago, there are wonderful and powerful stories that we have to share in our community, and the more we can share those stories, the better. The richer we become when we learn to share our stories. Not just what we do in our daily lives, in serving the community, but we share in our story that there is power in those stories. Many of you all have listened to young people,

children, many of the young documented children that Congressman referred to, their stories are so powerful that we need to listen to them. And because the more we can listen to our youth, I think the better we are as a community. So, please take time to listen to our young people.

The Congressman shared with you a little bit of my background as a farm worker, things that I'm very proud of. I'm glad that at the age of four, my parents took me out to pick cotton where I stayed all through junior high and high school to learn what hard work really means, to learn what family unity is all about, because in my home there were five children, four boys and one girl, and we had three bedrooms and a path -- that's not a bath, that's a path -- Baños estan afuera. And so, naturally my mother and my father had one bedroom, my sister had to have her bedroom, and well, the four boys had to share their bedroom. And we slept head to foot. You know, my brothers would have their head here and the other one would have his head over there, feet up here, head over there, feet up here. I was the youngest of four, it wasn't fair. I was sleeping between two brothers and two sets of feet. And so, you learn to appreciate some of those things that you can learn as a farm worker and a child growing up in the fields.

Even our dog. My biggest brother, my oldest brother, Daniel, had this thing for dogs. He loved dogs. And I got bitten by a dog once and so that ended that. I did not share his love of dogs or any kind of pets after that. But I felt sorry for our dog, because even growing up on a farm labor camp outside of Waco, Texas, I'd look at that poor dog and we were so crowded in there. You're talking about me rio por no llorar. We were so crowded in there, I don't know how that dog would make it around us. And then, I noted that even the dog learned to wag its tail this way because there was no room this way. And also learned how to make food stretch, how to make it go as far as possible. We kept it simple. In the morning, we would have frijoles con huevo, for lunch we will have huevos con frijoles, and for dinner we would have frijoles a huevo.

The highlights of my career can be summed up this way: The highlights were being when I was first arrested. That was a highlight in my life. I didn't say anything about it for 30 years but at the time at the White House, President Clinton decided to share that story, and so, word got out and so then I

felt more at ease talking about it. But being arrested was a highlight. I was fired from the only job I ever applied for. That was a highlight in my career. And again, I was arrested again and again. And those were highlights. And I share those with you in summary because Mickey asked me to focus on why I do what I do. What I have done is a little bit of what we're celebrating, but why is something that Mickey feels need to be shared. And those things, those experiences of being arrested, of being fired and arrested again is why I do what I do, it has given reason and meaning to the experiences that I have had. And I'm just very grateful to all y'all for that opportunity.

I want to just take a moment of personal privilege here and ask the USHLI table if they would please stand. These are young people who have received scholarships, who have received internships, who have been employed at USHLI, and we're very, very proud of you, very grateful to you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking again my good friend, Mickey Ibarra, and the board of Latino Leaders Network for this great honor. I've been to many of these luncheons and I've watched it all, Mickey's ability to bring so many prominent people together from all walks of life to honor and celebrate the life and work of so many people whom I have long admired. God as my witness, and I'm telling you the gospel truth, it never, ever crossed my mind once that I would be the honoree on a day like today, but thank you. Mickey makes things happen, and I am so grateful to you, Mickey, for selecting me, and the board, to receive this honor today. Please give Mickey Ibarra a well-deserved round of applause.

And to our Congressman Luis Gutiérrez, I thank him for that kind introduction, because he's a special person that can be defined in some ways and many different ways by different people. In my mind, Congressman, I would just say that you are the embodiment of a good conscience. You are the voice of justice in the swamp of dysfunctional government. You are the hope of millions who still live in the shadows, the comfort to the millions of children who live every day with the fear of losing their parents, and the uncertainty of their own future. Thank you, Congressman, for your years of service.

And while we're taking a moment to acknowledge some people, I know Mickey has already made some introductions and I don't

want to duplicate that, but I've got to single out one person that has just been so amazing and so inspiring and has lifted up so many people throughout his distinguished career, not the least of whom is -- my wife is an English teacher so I'm afraid to say this wrong -- including me. Did I get it right? But I don't know a single person in my lifetime who has had more influence, more influence from the highest level to the smallest barrio than Raul Yzaguirre.

And I have to again mention one more person that Mickey has already mentioned and so I'll just spare you the details, but a very special person in the room is Lidia Martinez. Please give it up for her and show her some love.

But the recognition that Mickey has orchestrated on my behalf has helped make my wife very proud to be married to me and it has also made my children very proud to have me as their father and it has also made me officially the most overrated Latino in the United States. But Mickey works that way. And the first time that I received a lifetime achievement award at the age of 50, a long time ago, though Mickey had nothing to do with that, I just happened to turn 50, and you know what happens when you turn 50 -- I got a letter of recognition from AARP. But Mickey has had a lot to do with other recognitions. And though he will never, ever admit it in public or even privately, I think he had everything to do with the highest honor I and very few other Latinos have ever received, and that's the medal from the president of the United States. Mickey, thank you so much for that. And while being decorated by the president "for the performance of exemplary deeds of service for the nation," it's indeed a high honor. But the highlight of meeting three fellow honorees that day was really the highlight. Those three honorees were Muhammad Ali, Hank Aaron, and Elizabeth Taylor. Only Mickey could put me in a place to share the stage with them. And I looked at them in awe, heroes and legends. I thought, "Well, three hits and a miss. That's not bad."

Before I go any further, I really want to thank God for the life I've had the chance to live and a very understanding and long-suffering wife, for it's not I am being honored today but the Almighty who call me to serve and my wife who let me answer that call. God picked her out for me, which was very cool, because he never gets it wrong, and we've been together this year for 50 years, my wife, Elena. And those of y'all who know

me know what I mean by long-suffering and what she has had to endure. There's a special place in heaven for her.

I'm standing on a trapdoor, and Mickey has assured me that he will not hesitate to pull the switch and will make me disappear if we don't finish on time, but I've got to tell you, this is the most difficult speech I have ever been asked to give. It's about me, about myself. Mickey asked me to not talk about what but talk about why. He said, "We all know what. Tell us why." And that is something that I've never done publicly in my career of 44 years.

I've given this speech a lot of thought because I've never really had to think about myself in this way. And as I give it more thought, I thought about the words of the Apostle Paul where the Apostle Paul said, "Sisters and brothers, let's not forget why we're here," and that is why we are here. Because at that time when the Apostle Paul wrote that scripture, people were saying, "I am with this group," "I am --," what we would today call "I am with Republicans," "I am with Democrats," "I am independent," "I am whatever." And as though to suggest some kind of division. And Paul saw that beginning to happen among the Corinthians and he said, "Sisters and brothers, let's not forget why we're here." Latinos, whether you are Democrats or Republicans or independents, it doesn't matter what affiliation. Why we're here is for our community. We are here for our families, we are here for our children, and it is incumbent upon us to do everything that we can to improve the quality of their lives and ensure that they have a bright and better and productive future. That is why we are here.

At the LULAC Convention in New York, God put a person in my path and gave us time to share this moment about today and asked me, "Are you ready?" I said, "No, I'm not frankly. I'm not quite sure how to phrase all this." And Michelle Minguez -- where is Michelle Minguez? I think she was --

Male Voice: She had to leave.

Juan Andrade: She had to leave? Oh, that's right. She said she was catching a train or something to New York. But Michelle sat down with me and helped me think this through and just asked me a simple question and said, "Three words that would describe why you do what you do. Three words." And while that conversation continued, and I continued to think about it for a couple of weeks later, trying to find those three

characteristics, those three things that I can share with you as to why I do what I do, that kind of crystallized in my mind what the focus of this message would be, and I'm very, very grateful to her for that.

We thought -- we mentioned a lot of words. We talked about empowerment. Yes, you could say I've been involved in that. Youth, serving our young people of course. Building a foundation for future generations, yes. Leadership, yes. Community service, yes. "But narrow it down to three," she said. And I narrowed it down this way. And so, if you'll bear with me a little bit, the three that I would like to share with you is "dreamer," "servant leadership," and "faith." Because to understand why I do what I do and have been doing now going into my fifth decade, you need to know when this all started.

Because I was born into a generation of dreamers, just like Raul Yzaguirre. Some of us had that opportunity to be born into a generation of dreamers during what was called "the forced Americanization of the southwest." This forced Americanization took certain characteristics. When the United States came to us, we, Mexicans, had our hands full in the southwest. More Mexicans were lynched during that period of forced Americanization. Few people know that more Latinos, almost all Mexicans, were lynched than all the blacks that were lynched in the south, and we need to be mindful of that.

Mexicans owned tens of millions of acres, land that covered entire states, but that land was stolen by the Americans and thousands of Mexicans were killed fighting to protect their ownership. It's estimated in some reports that over 200,000 Mexicans were killed by the Texas Rangers during this period of forced Americanization. And that forced Americanization took certain characteristics. We were not allowed to speak Spanish in public places and our schools were little more than rundown barns that were better suited for cattle. We had very few Mexican teachers because even when I graduated from college, barely one percent of Latinos had a college education. Mexicans were denied due process in the courts because it was against the law to testify in Spanish, the only language we knew. Mexicans were expected to quietly endure the disparity of what became known as Mexican wages, which meant whites were paid more for doing the same work. Farm workers had to bring their own drinking water to stay hydrated while working 12-hour days under

that unbearably, unbearably hot sun. In all the years that I worked as a farm worker, I never saw a restroom in the field. You just had to walk and walk and walk until you felt you were far enough out of sight to restore your comfort level as best you could. And our hourly rate was paid dependent entirely on the farmer because we had no bargaining unit.

Mexicans were allowed to vote, however, if we owned property, if we passed the literacy test, and if we could pay \$1.75 poll tax. The poll tax was hard enough, but it came with no guarantees that there would be anybody running for office that was worth \$1.75. Yet when it came to defending America in World War II, 500,000 Latinos, mostly Mexicans, answered the call and served with honor, courage, and valor. In one battle, one Latino captured 1500 enemy troops. One guy captured 1500. Because he fought so hard, the 1500 thought they were outnumbered.

Many Latinos received the Medal of Honor for their bravery and sacrifice under fire, but while these men and women were fighting for America, many veterans who died later were not even allowed to be buried next to white people in public cemeteries in their own hometown. I'm not saying this to indict America in any way. That was when it was the way it was. But to describe these conditions that gave rise to the greatest generation of dreamers in our nation's history, this is when this began to give reason as to why I've lived a life that I have.

These deplorable conditions and brutal injustices produce a generation of dreamers who dare to dream. And former Mayor Marty Chávez last night shared with us a little bit as to why it's important for us to share the story about those who came before us. It's important because they were dreamers who dared to dream. They weren't just another person. They dared to dream under the most adverse conditions, that despite the brutality of the times, despite the lynching, despite the discrimination, despite all of these things that we had to endure, they still dared to dream. God put them in our path so that they could dream and dare to dream.

They were the men and women of LULAC. I had the good fortune of growing up and reading about how Dr. Hector Garcia -- not Hector Garcia but how LULAC men and women were organizing in Texas to help fight those conditions, to fight for our civil

rights when the conditions that I just described were at their peak.

There were dreamers like Dr. Hector Garcia who dared to dream that he and his fellow veterans could create the American G.I. Forum to defend the dignity of those who served and those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and to pay for the education of their children.

Dreamers like Dr. Antonia Pantoja who dared to dream that she and her Puerto Rican brothers and sisters could create ASPIRA and give us entire generations of well-educated Aspirantes who will stay in school, serve the community, lead our organizations, and seek public office.

People like Ernesto Galarza and Herman Gallegos and Dr. Julian Samora who dared to dream that they could create an organization that would become known as NCLR to change public policy at the highest level that impacted every segment of American life and work.

Dreamer like Jack Otero and Eva Zavala and Damas Osera and Maria Portalatin who dared to dream that they and their fellow labor leaders could create LCLAA to politically empower 1.5 million trade unionists and involve their families in the electoral process.

Dreamer like Hector Barreto, Sr. who dared to dream that he and a band of entrepreneurs could create the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to organize over one million Latino business owners; into a powerful national and international economic powerbase.

Dolores Huerta and César Chávez who dared to dream that they could create the United Farm Workers Union to fight for the right of farm workers to organize and bargain collectively.

Congressman Ed Roybal who dared to dream that he and a few colleagues could create CHCI and NALEO, to sponsor programs that would help Latino students learn more about how government works and to organize Latino elected officials into a more powerful voice in public affairs respectively.

Mario Obledo and other attorneys who dared to dream that they could create MALDEF, a Mexican-American law firm to defend Latinos against racial discrimination and other injustices.

Willie Velásquez, the legendary Willie Velásquez and Maclovio Barraza who dared to dream that they could create

SVREP, a nonpartisan voter registration education project to politically empower Mexicans across the southwest.

Dreamers like Rey Gonzalez, Hank Lacayo, and Willie Velásquez who dared to dream that they could create USHLI to organize nonpartisan voter registration and education campaigns to motivate Latino youth to participate in the electoral process.

There were many other dreamers during that time and since that time to dream about creating organizations that would serve the Cuban, the Dominican and Puerto Rican communities. These are just a few of the many dreamers who stood for us during the darkest decades of anti-Latino sentiment in American history. It was their leadership that persuaded Congress to pass the American G.I. Bill and to Bilingual Education Act, the Civil Rights Act and the Voter Rights Act together with our African American brothers and sisters. These dreamers risked their lives to speak out against wholesale lynching of Latinos and risked their jobs to fight for change. They risked their lives to unite workers and sacrificed whatever it took to win the fight for our rights. As co-founder of USHLI, I'm proud to have been born into this great generation of dreamers who dare to dream that we could create our own institutions, and one of the youngest of those dreamers, I am now one of the few who are still alive and the longest-serving president of the National Latino Organization. But the conditions that I described above are reasons why I have done what I have. I was born a dreamer and given a mission, a mission that became my purpose in life, and every day I get up is another day to fight the good fight.

As I survey this room, I know many of you had nothing to do with winning the rights we have today, but that's okay because you weren't born yet. But while you had nothing to do with winning these rights, I believe that destiny has ordained you to be the guardians of our rights. And believe me, we need to be vigilant and fight to defend our rights, no matter the price you have to pay. Why? Because we have to fight because the lynching of Latinos is not over. No, we're not being hung by the neck but we're being lynched in other ways. Over 20 states have passed laws to suppress the Latino vote. Bilingual education is being eliminated in many places. The Voting Rights Act is being decimated. States are withholding funds from universities who offer Mexican American studies. Mexicans were

evicted from a bar in the state of Oregon for drinking in Spanish. Unaccompanied children are being sent back home to some of the most violent cities in the world. Over one million Latino family units have been dismembered through the failed deportation policies that we've had. Hate crimes against Latinos are at an all-time high and the list goes on.

Young people, don't let this happen on your watch. We will win the fight for respect and the full integration of Latinos into American society, but more of us will have to pay the price, more sacrifices will have to be made. But don't give up. Don't ever give up fighting for our community. I was arrested for speaking Spanish to students who didn't understand English. It seemed unjust. And as a young father with one son and being arrested and effectively ending your teaching career that was a price to be paid but a price worth paying. Why? Because now teachers are paid a bonus for being able to do what got me arrested.

Justice is on the side of time and time is on our side. I got fired from the top job in Ohio State government for doing the right thing, and when I went back as a keynote speaker at the 25th anniversary celebration of that agency that I helped create, the guy who worked for the governor who had me fired picked me up at the airport and chauffeured me around all day. I lost my classroom but was given a national audience. I lost my job in one state and now I cover 40. Don't be afraid, young people, of consequences. Don't be afraid to pay the price. Don't be afraid of the consequences because take it from this happy warrior, consequences only make the victories all that much sweeter.

The Bible teaches us the second point that I want to mention. This is a lot more brief. Mickey's jaw just dropped. I'm watching out for this trapdoor. And this is about servant leadership, very quickly. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord saw the people suffering and it said that He was moved with compassion. He saw that the people were hungry and he fed them by the thousands. He didn't say, "If we feed them, more will come." Being moved with compassion defines servant leadership. When the Good Samaritan saw the man by the side of the road, he didn't ask him for papers. He didn't ask him if he had a visa. He didn't call the minutemen. He didn't call the border patrol. He didn't call Sheriff Arpaio or any one of these. He showed

compassion and gave the immigrant food and water and a place to stay until he was ready to get back on his way. That's servant leadership. Servant leadership is about believing that we're here to serve and not to be served. Servant leadership is serving others, helping others, and doing for others.

In the Bible there's a story where the Lord sat with the apostles around Him, and the apostles asked Him, "Lord, who is the greatest leader?" And I could just see Peter getting ready to be called out on this one, and of course "It's Peter upon whom I -- he is a rock --" maybe he said he rocks, I don't know -- "upon whom I will build My church." And interestingly, what the Lord said to the disciples, the greatest leader is the greatest servant. The greatest leader is the greatest servant. So, we are here to serve, young people. My brothers and sisters, we are here to serve and not to be served.

This is one of the things that I've learned about servant leadership and I'd share with you in close on this note that it is not success -- success is not measured by how high you climb. It's measured by how far you can reach. That is what defines servant leadership. That is what leadership is all about. Sure, we care about our careers. We do want to rise to the next level, but only if it serves a greater purpose. Only if it serves a greater good. The leadership is defined by not how high you climb but how far you can reach.

Let me just close really for sure, because Mickey is now on his feet. I am grateful for the recognition, the honors that I've received, but the only one -- and I've not thought them, never even thought imaginable -- but there is one, I can tell you, there is one honor and one recognition that I really, really seek. It's a recognition that I think about all the time and I am still seeking to hear that voice of God welcome me into paradise saying, "Well done. Well done my good and faithful servant. Enter now thou into the joy of the Lord." That's what it's all about. That that recognition that many of us get needs to come at that level and remembering why we are here, that we are here to serve and not to be served. Thank you so much for this opportunity and for this great honor. Thank you all very much.

[End of transcript]