



**Remarks by  
Hon. Gaddi H. Vasquez  
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series**

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The Club at Key Center  
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Gaddi Vasquez: Thank you very much, Senator Hatch. I want to say right off the top that it is my strong opinion and belief that Senator Orrin Hatch is a Latino at heart. And I say so because in the early years when not many were paying attention to the issues of importance to Latinos in America, Senator Hatch formed a task force that Anna Cabral headed as a professional and executive on his behalf, and it was through that task force, that Hispanic task force that many, many important conversations have begun and it did so because Senator Hatch established the foundational work that has brought us to this day. And I will tell you that as someone who has admired Senator Hatch for many, many years and who I also want to publicly thank for voting in support of my confirmation on two occasions. I thank you for that, Senator, as well. I thank you very much.

I want to thank the Latino Leaders Network and its energetic and tireless leader and founder, Mickey Ibarra. And to all of my friends who are here from California, I say thank you for being here on this occasion. I know that attending these events during political conventions is an experience as you move through the security maze and all the barriers and obstacles that are before you. And to my friend, Rudy Beserra, with whom we have traveled many, many miles over decades, one, I thank the good Lord we're both still here, but secondly I could not have had a better colleague, friend, and partner as we have traveled through many, many different journeys in our both public and private careers. And it's a pleasure to be able to share this very, very special day with Rudy Beserra.

There are many things that I would like to say today but I have been given an allotment of time and it is brief. But I can't speak today in accepting this award without making reference to the events of the past seven days.

My heart goes out, as I suspect yours do as well, to the families of the law enforcement officers who have lost their lives and to the other officers in other parts of the United States who today are recovering from wounds from shootings and assaults. Because as Senator Hatch mentioned, I began my public service career as a police officer. I know what it is to put on a badge and to wear a gun on your hip, to leave the back lot of a police department and hope and pray that you return at the end of watch to go home to your family. So, I am familiar of the perils of police work in America. But I also know the great responsibility to administer and enforce the laws in a way that gives communities a sense of bonding with their local police and the mutual trust that must exist in our communities. We must stand together in spirit of peace and pray for the healing that needs to occur in this hour of need. We must never, ever, ever allow violence and anger to overtake us.

In 1987 when I first served in my elected office, first elected office, I was excited. I was enthused at the prospects of Latino political empowerment even though there weren't many of us back then. People back then said Latinos were the sleeping giant. And others referred to the '80s as the decade of the Hispanic, which always sort of amused me because it's sort of like set a definitive timeline that we had a decade and if we didn't, well, then that was it. But ladies and gentlemen, we've gone way beyond the '80s because today we have improved and advanced and grown the number of elected officials of Latino origin by leaps and bounds. Anytime you hear of a state representative from the state of Rhode Island, not a state you typically think of as Latino, you know you're making progress. As leaders we must engage and promote civic engagement in the Latino community, but we must take ownership and we must seek to build a political platform for the future. We should encourage and press greater civic engagement in all of our communities. So, I encourage you to stand, believe in, but also recognize that the ballot box as the equalizer that balances the voices of influence in our democracy.

In all of my years I have never been more concerned for my country. We are living in perilous times and the threats at home and abroad pose unprecedented challenges that our leaders will and must confront. But I remain very confident that our

strong sense of purpose and commitment to each other will help us overcome the challenges before us.

A few years ago, a friend of mine called and said, "Gaddi, come on over to my place and let's have lunch. My godmother happens to be in town." "Great." I drove over to my friend's business, walked into a room with six chairs. I looked across the table and my eyes came in contact with a petite, small woman. Much to my surprise, my friend's godmother was Rosa Parks. And for the next two hours, I sat across the table from Rosa Parks, mesmerized, just watching and listening and observing. And the greatest takeaway of that moment in time in my life from Rosa Parks and my meeting with Rosa Parks was that you don't have to be the tallest in the room or in the country because she was small and petite, and you don't have to have the loudest voice in the room or in the community but she was effective and she had a deep and profound sense of purpose in her heart. And when those elements can come together, you can indeed change the course of history as Rosa Parks taught us.

Like many of you, I was born into poverty as a child of migrant farm workers. I lived through periods of hunger and food insecurity but we never lost our sense of direction and we never yielded to the plight of poverty. So, it was a privilege to be able to serve as a United States ambassador leading the fight against poverty, disease, and hunger in the world. And I led the Peace Corps, which is comprised of Americans who serve overseas and far and distant lands with the purpose of promoting peace, friendship, and understanding between Americans and the people in those host countries. As the first Latino to lead the Peace Corps in its history, I was proud to lead thousands of Americans serving across the face of the earth. And the best part about the Peace Corps volunteers; they were determined and believed that you could still impact the world one town one village, one community at a time. And I'm pleased to tell you that this year 25,000 Americans applied to serve in the Peace Corps. That's the power of people making a difference. They answered the call.

As I close my remarks, and again thanks for this opportunity, I quote President Ronald Reagan who once said, "I know in my heart that man is good, that what is right will always eventually triumph, and there's purpose and worth to each and every life." Ladies and gentleman, I encourage you to join me in resolving to build better and stronger communities and resolve to leave our children an inheritance that is built on love, respect, and equality for all. It is the greatest inheritance that we can leave them after we have left the bounds of Earth. And I leave

you with this Biblical thought from II Chronicles 7 and 14, "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Thank you for this honor. It is a high privilege. Thank you.