



The Antonio Villaraigosa Leadership Award
Remarks of Mayor Todd Gloria
The St. Regis, Washington, DC
January 18, 2023

Todd Gloria: Well, Mayor, I don't mind a photo of you on my desk. I don't know how I'm going to get this through TSA though. I think I'll have a little explaining to do. Mayor Villaraigosa, thank you so much for these extremely generous comments.

I was thinking about this moment for the few weeks since Mickey told me the good news. And I was thinking about my Puerto Rican grandmother who bought a home in the Clairemont corner of San Diego, on Goldboro Avenue. We have some San Diegans in the house. You may know where that is. Her view was of the University of San Diego, our local Catholic university. Good Catholic family you might imagine.

And I was the first in my family to go to college. I think that is because my grandmother, when she would look after me when my parents were working, we would sit in the front yard of

her home looking up at that university and she would say you are going to go to college there.

Now the idea of being in college a few blocks from my grandmother's house didn't really hold up a lot of appeal even as a young person, but in fact that's exactly where I ended up going to college and being the first in my family to get a bachelor's degree.

I share that story because there's an adage in politics that many of us have heard before. That if you haven't seen it, you can't be it. I don't think it's any accident that no one before me in my family went on to college because they didn't have that really there - that visual, that admonition that this is what you're going to do.

So, when I think of Mayor Villaraigosa, I think of that. If you can see it, you can be it. Whether he knew it or not, a Dodger fan in LA before a Padre fan down in San Diego, through his service no matter how many years it may have been. The most important answer, sir, is that you still look good. That's the most important part. Am I right? Give it up for Villaraigosa everybody. Right?

Through his trailblazing service there, a little boy in San Diego, I know young people all across our state and all across our country who saw your example and realized what they could be, many of us are living up to that full potential. So I thank

you for the doors that you opened, for the ceilings that you shattered through, thank you. Thank you, thank you, Mayor Villaraigosa. I appreciate you.

So really, this is not my first U.S. Conference of Mayors' event. I'm standing between you and a happy hour, a second one maybe. I know mayors have gone wild when you're outside of your own cities. I understand how this works. I will do my best to be brief. I talk really fast, so just listen fast too. Okay?

I definitely want to acknowledge Reverend Pierre. I thank you for the comments about the calories. I believe that same thing. Lord, please keep this off my body. This used to be show business for ugly people. Now here we are. So, I need all the help I can get. Your prayers are appreciated.

To my colleague, Mayor Romero, thank you for those extremely kind comments. This can be lonely work. This can be lonely work, leading your city. But it is the camaraderie between mayors that is so important. And to have a friend on the border like Mayor Romero, thank you so much for being here and for those extremely kind words.

I also want to acknowledge our ambassadors who are here. Your Excellencies, thank you, particularly to my friend, Mayor - not mayor, higher - Ambassador Moctezuma. San Diego is proudly a binational community. As mayor of the largest border city in the country, you can imagine my frustration when I hear the way

people describe the border, which is so different from what it actually is. We are a better city, a stronger city, a more prosperous city because of our proximity to Mexico. I appreciate you when they ask me for the strong relationship that we have together.

To Julie, thank you for those extremely kind comments. You can imagine that little boy in that front yard in Clairemont imagining someone from the White House even knowing my name, let alone saying the kind things that you've mentioned. I appreciate our partnership, our relationship, and I definitely appreciate having the strong partner that President Biden is to cities. In my life, there has never been a better president for cities. I definitely appreciate the president, the vice president, your entire administration for the open door policy that you have with all of us. I think a lot of the mayors here would echo those comments. And thank you very much for being here.

To my friend Lidia Martinez, Lidia is really glad that she retired from Southwest recently. But what I say is even when I couldn't get home on Christmas -- too soon as well? That's okay. I've flown three times since then. So, it's all good. But it was Lidia who I was thinking about. You know, like this is a good company. It's all going to work out just fine. I got my voucher. We're all good.

But here's the thing. Here's the thing. What I know about Lidia is that she cares deeply about her community. That's what made her brilliant at her job. It's what causes her to even in retirement, continue to serve her community. I'm appointing her to our regional airport authority because if you've been to Terminal 1 in San Diego, I apologize. Come back in a couple of years and we'll have a new one for you. It will be because of Lidia's leadership. I appreciate you, Lidia.

Last but not least, of course, to Mickey Ibarra who brings us all together. I've never seen so much charisma, so much persuasion, so much energy. Mickey, I'm so pleased to know you. I'm grateful for the trailblazing role that you have played in really creating this opportunity not for this award, which I deeply appreciate, but to bring us all together.

I make jokes about no one really missed rubber chicken dinners during the pandemic. I missed going out to eat. I missed seeing my friends in person, hanging out with my grandparents or whatever. But seeing the ten top table, chicken, a little special sauce, no one missed that. What we missed was being together and the camaraderie.

So, Mickey, you are a convener of Olympic proportions. I thank you for creating these opportunities to bring us together as you've had throughout your entire career.

So, I promised I wouldn't keep you long. My staff wrote a lot of policy points, and they are brilliant - I love you guys. But we're going to skip that because it's like 9:08 and there's a vodka soda waiting somewhere out there.

So let me say for those of you that are wondering, you heard Puerto Rican, Native American, Filipino, Dutch, and gay. The first in San Diego history. Can you believe that? That combination has never happened before ever in the city's history. You're like, how? And the answer is the Navy, that's how.

All around the world, my grandparents found their way to San Diego, and they stayed because it's amazing. Right? You are saying this is warm weather. Are you insane? It is 70 degrees back home. This is lovely weather. San Diego is an amazing place to be. My grandparents stayed and they built a life for themselves there.

What I want to share with you was maybe two quick stories. One is about how far we have come because I think it's illustrative of what the Latino Leaders Network is about. My grandparents and that home in Clairemont I mentioned to you, my grandparents, when they tried to buy that home in the late 1950s, they were told no. Not here. You don't belong in this neighborhood. You are not allowed here.

Now, if you met my Puerto Rican grandmother and my Filipino grandfather and you recognized that they couldn't even really get married easily and that was a hard fight to actually legally get married in California at that time, you wouldn't be surprised if they fought their way, and they did buy that house. But they had to put more money down than anybody else on that block. Any other family was charged less than they were charged for the privilege and opportunity to live in what was considered a white neighborhood.

My grandfather in my life I never saw him in anything other than a three-piece suit, in my whole life. Mowing the lawn of that home in Claremont, he did it in a three-piece suit. Now, as a kid, I thought he was a little bit weird. Truth be told, he was a little bit weird. But the reality that I didn't understand until I was a grown man was that my grandfather wore that suit to communicate to the world around him that he was a man worthy of respect. Without that suit, he did not believe he would be treated fairly, reasonably, and in a legal manner. So that's what he had to do.

I share that story of being denied the opportunity to get married, to being denied to be able to buy a home, to be able to have to wear a suit in a blazing hot summer day and mowing your lawn because you were afraid otherwise people would see you as

something less than a man. Two generations later that couple's grandson became the mayor of the city of San Diego.

I share that story because I think we have to celebrate our successes big and small. We have tremendous victories that have been delivered to us by great leaders like Mayor Villaraigosa, like the Biden administration and so many other things, but we can't lose sight of the fact at how far we have come as a community. The Lord knows we still have a long way to go.

But I was a history major in college. By the way, don't be the first in your family to graduate from college majoring in history because my parents were like are you going to have a job? Does that pay anything? You can get a job like that? For the record, I never moved home, and I've never required my parents' help.

But I was a history major because it's important to me to chart how far we have come. We've come a long way and so many people in this room are responsible for that. I thank all of you for the contributions that you make in opening the doors of opportunity a bit wider for all of us.

The last story I wanted to share with you is just an explanation for why I do this work, because this is about service and contribution, bringing folks together, and hopefully making progress. Growing up, a path to public service wasn't exactly the most likely thing that ever happened. My mom was a

hotel maid. My dad was a gardener. Not surprisingly those jobs don't necessarily help you make ends meet in a town as expensive as San Diego even in the 1970s and 1980s.

Growing up, there were periods of time when we couldn't afford a car in our family. It's nearly impossible today in San Diego; it was particularly difficult back then in San Diego. So, on occasion we would have to borrow someone else's car just to be able to do basic needs in our family. What we'd have to do when we borrow that car was my brother and I would be forced to wash that car when we were done - bucket, soap, sponge, water - doing all of that. I remember thinking that's strange.

Then before we returned the car to somebody, we'd have to go fill it up with gas. And even gas in the 1980s was expensive. I mean, I know it's rough now in California. What you all are paying out here is amazing. In California, it's rough. But even then, it was true - rough, high, expensive.

The point is this. I'm like, ma, dad, why are we doing this? Why are we spending money on soap, and water, and sponges, and buckets, and gas if we are borrowing cars because we can't afford a car? Their answer to me was that you were supposed to leave things better than you found them. That is our responsibility in life, is to leave things better than you found it.

Now, the maid and the gardener who weren't registered to vote until I was doing a voter registration campaign in 1992, they didn't understand that that was a recipe for public service. It was the direction to me to say go out and serve your community. If you love your hometown, then you're supposed to spend your life doing whatever you can to make it a better place. I think that's a unifying common denominator in this room of people who are so committed to this community, to your respective cities, to this cause of local government, of democracy.

I share that story because that is definitely a story borne of immigrants, of working class families, of communities of color. And that's the work that I do every single day at city hall recognizing that there is a young person who's looking at my example today. My hope is I inspire them to follow beyond me because, you're right, we're the first but the goal is to not be the last.

In the work that I do and that I'm privileged to do is, when I sit at that desk, I can appoint qualified Latinas to lead multibillion-dollar public agencies because they're good at it and they're qualified and they're going to do a great job. I use that opportunity to do that. When we restructure our infrastructure policies, we recognize that equity does have a component in infrastructure.

Yes, as mayor of the City of San Diego I got to fill potholes in every neighborhood. I got to do that. But I also have to acknowledge that, in our 3000 miles of paved roads in the city, the 30 or so miles that are unpaved - never been paved - in the 8th largest city in this country happened to be in the predominantly Latino and African American communities. So, when we talk about equity, it does belong in the infrastructure conversation because a pothole is bad. But you know what's worse? It's a dirt road particularly after the storms that we've been experiencing in San Diego recently.

All of this is to say I have only done this job for two years, so I am deeply appreciative of this early recognition. I will take it as inspiration to make sure the last six, God willing -- we have a lot of San Diegans in here. Cindy Marten, I need you to move back to San Diego just in time to vote. Okay? For the six more years that I'm able to do this work, that I will go to city hall with this on my desk - Mayor - and remember my grandfather and grandmother, the trail that they blazed, the barriers they overcame. Recognizing that, whatever is still in my way, it pales in comparison to what they had to endure to give me the opportunity to go to college, to run for office, to lead this city. And that I'll do it with the memory of my parents - my mother and my dad - understanding that my

sole responsibility in this world is to leave it better than I found it.

I thank all of you for being partners in that effort to make sure that collectively we can leave this world better than we found it.

Now I want you to all go to have a great cocktail. I want you to make good choices the rest of your night. But I want you to come back to the conference tomorrow so that we can engage in the work that we're here today do. The work of making sure that we leave our country, our states, our cities, our communities better than we found it. Thank you all so much for this honor.