



Latino Leaders Network  
Mayor Tim Keller Remarks  
June 3, 2022

Tim Keller: Well, it is wonderful to be here. I want to just thank especially Mayor Villaraigosa. Of course, how awesome is it to have a lieutenant governor and former governor and president here. Thank you so much for coming and supporting our mayors from around the country. Let's give them a round of applause as well.

You know, for Albuquerque, this is a really, really special occasion. So, I want to share a few things. But I also want to share that the 20-something me, if you said name two mayors to myself like 20 years ago, I would have said Mayor Chavez - who was Albuquerque's mayor, if you remember - and Mayor Villaraigosa. So, what an honor to get this award and celebrate it with our city and with you and in 2022. It's an amazing, I think, American story. So, thank you (Antonio Villaraigosa) so much for all you've done, for putting this together and for Los Angeles and for America.



Now I think I want to share just some remarks with you. I know Mickey keeps a tight schedule. Well, here's the good news. I mean I don't think my remarks are up here. So, you're going to get some real off the cuff stuff. Oh, there we go. So, a little filibuster there for a minute.

First, how many had been to Duke City? A few. I mean how many of you have seen *Breaking Bad*? Don't lie. *Better Call Saul*? All right. So, you haven't been there, but you've seen that. We're not going to talk about that today, but we really just love that we're included in some of those shows. We've got a great film industry.

But what I do want to share with you is, you know, our town is pretty old. We're 318 years old. Of course, Brian mentioned a little bit about its history. I love history and of course the history of New Mexico is fascinating. We're not going to talk about it too much tonight, but I want to share with you just a few aspects that have made us the city that we are.

Tonight, I'm reminded that the City of Albuquerque is special to me. It has formed who I am as a person. It has formed my values. I came back explicitly with -- I met my wife



there. We started a family there. It has defined our family as well. So, like all mayors, we love our city. We all think our cities are special. But I know Albuquerque is special to me in terms of foundation as a person.

So, I refer to myself as a *Burqueño*. You might not have heard that term. That's what people in Albuquerque call themselves even if they're not Latino. That's who we are. We're *Burqueños*. And when you're a *Burqueño* -- I also know I'm Irish Catholic. I grew up middle class. Look, plenty of white privilege, lots of ignorance. It took me at least a decade to understand how special the place was that I grew up in.

I think when you see anyone who thinks a little bit about heroism, who is an activist in New Mexico or familiar with the Chicano movement or the Latino movement and different aspects of our country, you know that in Albuquerque we have deep powerful roots of resistance. Those roots of resistance, they still are all around us in New Mexico. Somebody mentioned sopapillas earlier. Look - our food, our music, our language, our Spanglish, our traditions - it is all around you in Albuquerque that we are a minority/majority city so much so that that term



doesn't even makes sense to us. We've always been that. In fact, it is a little bit of the reverse. When you come to Albuquerque, you basically have to honor the living Latino culture and history. And I will tell you especially if you want to survive in politics.

So, I came back home after being gone for about ten years. Brian shared some of my sojourns in Cambodia and other places. But I got involved in community organizing in a place called the International District. Believe it or not, in that era it was called war zone. I later became their state senator, and my first bill was to rename that community. Because they felt that that term, "the war zone", for the most dense and the most of color, and the lowest income district in the entire State of New Mexico, it was derogatory and racist. We renamed that district and it's still called the International District today.

But it was the experience in the Senate where I really learned about our state. I also learned about political power, and I learned about Chicano leadership. I know a lot of mayors have been in state legislatures. Of course, governors have had to work with them, but the Senate caucus in New Mexico has for a



long time been majority Latino. When you come into an environment like that, with my kind of background, you quickly brush up on your Spanish. You also learn the difference between *weto* and *carnal*. You know when to turn your head up a notch or turn your head. There are some other words too I cut out this because they're a little more racy.

But, look, you also learn about the fight in New Mexico against the American colonizers. And it was a fight for our language, for Spanish. It actually resulted in a 60-year delay and why we became a state - we're the *only* state - where Spanish is guaranteed in the Constitution. You also learn about the Chicano reclamation of power in the '70s because it had been taken by the Anglo movement in the '50s. That continues even in the '90s where we had something called the [indiscernible] movement. All of this is New Mexico stuff, but all of it means that I learned a whole lot from a lot of people. I'm indebted to our Latino leadership for making me who I am today.

I also learned you got to learn to dance the *ranchera*. When you got Governors Martinez and Lujan, you got to be ready to get up there when the mariachis come on. I know though that



despite our Latino heritage, the forces of assimilation and of racism, they are of course alive and well in our city just like everywhere else unfortunately in America.

I'll tell you just a short, small story. I was sworn in as the 10th mayor of Albuquerque. That doesn't make any sense. Tenth mayor. We've been around for so long. I had our historians look into this and of course they found out we have - - I live one block from Alcalde Street and all of that history had been whitewashed out. It was as if Albuquerque was born in the 1970s. We changed that now, by the way. We have murals, and convention center, and in the mayor's office, and a history museum that tells our whole history from *alcaldes* to mayors.

But I know I'm here today because of Latino leadership and Latino mentorship. And I know that I also run the city on the shoulders of a city cabinet that is 65 percent Latino. All our police chiefs and fire chiefs are Latino. And it's never lost on me that I was elected by the Latino vote. So, I know that they've entrusted me for a couple of things. One is to honor those roots of resistance, but also because resistance today is not just about conflict. It's about resisting the divisive



forces that we heard about earlier today that unfortunately we've come to expect in America. It's about a defined commitment to building bridges towards each other, which Mayor Villaraigosa spoke of. It's doing that instead of building up walls that divide us.

I know some of the mayors were here in 2017 when there was the child separation issue at the border and the wall. And look, we came in -- I have never been so proud of the mayors who showed up on a bipartisan basis on the border to protest what was happening to those families. You all inspired me. I came back and I told our newly informed Office of Equity and Inclusion what was -- they knew what was happening and, actually, some of them went with me on the trip.

I said what are we going to do about this in Albuquerque, because we're pretty close to the border, and how are we going to help Las Cruces and our friend Mayor Miyagishima. They came up and they said this is the beginning of our Office of Equity and Inclusion. I ran on that when no one knew what those words meant. I had to spend time in TV debates explaining the difference between equity and equality. Now fortunately people



know a little bit more. They understand a little bit more about those terms.

But I want to let you know that we decided that our roots of resistance in that environment meant that we had to stand up against the separation of families, against the othering of humans. And it meant that we had to do something on our end to build a bridge for those individuals who were dehumanized. We had to honor fundamentally who we are as a city.

We are a city of immigrants and of indigenous people. We stand for bridges. Not walls. So, we publicly and defiantly stood in the face of the presidential administration at that time. We said we welcome those refugees. We spend thousands, actually hundreds of thousands, of taxpayer dollars providing hotel rooms for those families, healthcare, food. [Applause] Thank you.

People said, well, you can't use government resources. We used city buses. We used city law enforcement. We used everything we could to help those families. We did it in the face of public derision nationally, from our president at the time, and against the threats of loss of funding. But



Albuquerque understood fundamentally that that could have been our family. Right? That could have been my brother-in-law. They needed a bridge into America. We wanted to help with that bridge and the U.S. Conference of Mayors stood with us. Thank you so much, mayors, for standing up in that era.

We have a saying in our city. It's called One Albuquerque. For us, that has become a clarion call for us to play a role in unifying our city and for living out what Mayor Villaraigosa spoke of. And it is a commitment that says it doesn't matter where you came from or when you got here. You're a part of our community.

For us, when we think of One Albuquerque, that was what guided us through COVID. Our Office of Equity and Inclusion did the same thing during COVID. They said here's what we're going to do, we're going to do COVID response through an equity lens. So we gave \$30 million out as aid and we never asked for documentation. And we still don't today. We help every single person in our community no matter what.

Then we said let's look at our neighborhoods. We got all the infrastructure money, it's like where has the money been



going in our community. It's been going of course to the more affluent neighborhoods, the newer neighborhoods, where we divided nine races because we have nine councilors. That's wrong. It should go to the communities that need it most. That is institutional discrimination.

So we reversed that. A hundred million dollars now go into our Latino historic neighborhoods, our communities of color, all because of the Office of Equity and Inclusion which didn't follow orders from the emergency responders or our planning department. It was the reverse. In Albuquerque, they're cabinet level and they give the orders. That was why we were able to do this. That's why our office is so effective.

I want to just share with you I think one other piece about our story in Albuquerque. It again is about that Office of Equity and Inclusion. When we had the summer of social justice reckoning, when we had also high crime in our town which we still have, we had to reconcile two things in our community. Crime is going up. We don't have enough police officers. How do we support fighting crimes? Then communities, as you said,



they want a different response. They didn't need police officers. They needed help.

Our Office of Equity and Inclusion came up with the concept of creating an entirely new response. Our Community Safety Department is now up and running. It's an alternative response to 911. It is fully funded. It's got \$15 million. It's got 50-plus social workers. It's taking 2,000 calls away from cops and also giving the response that we need in the community. *That* has been the power of our Office of Equity and Inclusion. It's starting new ideas. It's building bridges. And it's tearing down walls. [Applause] Thank you.

So let me wrap up by just saying, going forward, it's our call to honor I think that spirit of resistance and also the ability to build bridges that of course is at the forefront of today's political challenges. We talked a lot about what happens in our communities with gun violence, about extreme ideologies that are fueling mass tragedies on a city-by-city level. We all say the names of the towns we remember and even those that we never want to forget. Whether it's Buffalo, Uvalde, El Paso, Sutherland Springs - we know the communities.



Unfortunately, communities of color feel the deepest wounds. There is a correlation right now between gun violence, and equity, and racism. That is yet another reason why I was so glad to see our vice president today and all our mayors join in unison to say we have reached the breaking point. We absolutely have to have action from our Congress.

So, resistance now I believe means standing up against the gun lobby. Let's just be clear, we cannot let them push us around. Resistance also means standing up against white supremacy. That is explicitly what Buffalo is about. And for our immigrant communities, resistance means standing up against assimilation policies. They are alive and well in so many school districts all across America. We have to fight that battle as well.

I know that every person here tonight is part of building those bridges, so I want to thank you for coming this evening. And I know even our corporate sponsors, they have commitments to diversifying boards or diversifying managements or even having Latino and Latina voices in advertising. Or it's the mayors who are dedicated to looking through things with an equity lens.



We're all part of the bridge building that happens today, including of course this very network. That's what it's all about, building those bridges.

And our master bridge builder, Mickey Ibarra, let's recognize him again. Thank you so much, Mickey. Thank you for connecting us tonight. Thank you for showing us the way forward. On behalf of Albuquerque, New Mexico, thank you so much. *Mil gracias.* Thank you.