



Remarks by:
The Honorable Charlie Gonzalez
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series

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Congressman Charles Gonzalez: Please be seated because I know Mickey prides himself upon being on time on this. The first sign that you're a former member almost is when there's going to be a press conference at two o'clock and you didn't know about it. To Leader Pelosi, those incredibly kind words and I can't begin to tell you how much I admired the leader, I don't think anybody ever gave Leader Pelosi the credit for leading a very diverse group of Democrats and especially when she was speaker and I think history will write very favorably what was accomplished under her leadership as speaker.

To Joaquín Castro, I knew Joaquin's mother who was a big activist for many, many years and so of course she raised two young men with that kind of a social conscience and a heart to help people so I expect great things from Joaquin, great things from Julián Castro. And I think they're going to be the ones that will be turning Texas blue in a very short period of time.

Felix didn't tell you but we grew up in the same neighborhood, our little school, Our Lady of Sorrows, I'm obviously much older than Felix, I was even a role model to him back then except I was trying to teach him how to be a juvenile delinquent. That was many years ago, so we go back, gosh, I hate to even think how long ago but his wonderful beautiful parents, they're such a great family. Leonard, Leony was here, of course from Exxon, Leony used to practice before me when I was a district court judge, you never know, you can't remember all the cases and how you ruled it. But he always -- obviously I must have ruled in his favor because he has good memories of coming to my court.

What Leonard said was very true, so we were having a fund raiser in San Antonio and it was for Senator Menendez and Henry Cisneros was there, and all the State's rep was there, State senators were there and they were talking about an event. And Henry and I looked at each other and I say, "Hey, were you invited?" We looked at each other in front of everybody there and we go, "No!" And he says, "Man, if you think this was something, wait till you're no longer in office." So I think there was a lot of truth to what's going to happen to my invitation list, so if you have a party or something and you have an extra invitation, I'm around.

To Mickey and the Latino Leader Network, this is incredible, I remember when it started and it's just getting bigger and better, this is not a partisan effort. I know how many of us feel strongly about certain issues and such but when all's been said and done I think if you truly belong to the network and you're a public official or you're out there in the private sector, we all have the same goal, and that is how we improve the opportunities for the Latino communities throughout this country. And it is not an easy task and there are so many ways to do it but I want to touch on some things quickly. I'm going to take the prescribed amount of time, Mickey, I'm going to stick to this, I did prepare some remarks and some of you may have heard me before because I spoke at the New American Alliance in Miami during the election. And I was pointing something out and I'm hoping that it's not like Yogi Berra says, "Déjà vu all over again," because if you remember in July of last year with the debt ceiling and we entered the agreement that finds us today at the fiscal cliff and such.

So what was happening back then, people were very upset with Congress and the *Washington Post* ran a poll. And the poll showed that both Democratic and Republican members of Congress had an approval rating of only 33 percent and that was in July of 2011. Of course you know today it's much lower but it is still in double digits, except the first digit is a zero, other than that we are doing great. So you would think, "Gosh, you guys don't you feel terrible?" Gridlock, you're not moving the country forward and such 33 percent. And we did feel kind of bad until we went and read the rest of the poll. In this poll they also asked, "If you believe in God, how do you feel about the job God is doing?" God only received a 52 percent approval rating. We figured we're only 19 points behind God, that's not so bad now. And so the new members are coming in and you're going to find all sorts of ways to rationalize hard headedness and gridlock in Washington, I hope that you would do a better job and I think that you will.

There's something that Mickey said that I had to cover and I do want to start off with that and that is my only experience as a Latino elected official but my story is unique from almost everybody else's, Ben Lujan has a similar story but I mean, I'm not exactly the model you're going to follow because I was very fortunate in many ways.

Well, first and foremost, I'm Mexican-American, Joaquin and I, many of you, well this is what's amazing about all Mexican-Americans, just the way I tried to explain it when I was at the Mexican Ambassador's, at the embassy one day, I said, "How many Americans can say that their great grandparents were once living in another country before living in the United States without ever having to move?" You know exactly what I'm talking about.

When I was born, under race, my father put Democrat. I was born a Democrat; I would not know anything else. When I say -- he was so unique, is that my father was Henry B. Gonzalez and I can never recall a time that my father was not seeking election. When he retired in 1998 that was obviously the '96 election and that was it; but he was always running for office. But I was the right age of the eight kids, my brothers and sisters, the older ones were interested in being real teenagers, the younger ones were just too young, but I travelled with Dad when he was a State Senator.

As an aside, I will say it because Joaquin touched on it, this past November 6, is the first time that a Gonzalez name was not on the ballot in 60 years. Oh no, it was just -- it was quite an experience in many ways, but when Dad would go to Austin we would drive, he didn't live in Austin, it's just an hour and a half drive or back then it was an hour, and we would get there. But I saw him in the mid-50s actually filibuster for 22 hours against segregation bills along with fellow State Senator Chick Kazen from Laredo, Lebanese American, obviously been raised in Laredo and understood what discrimination was all about.

But it was an amazing time and I found such adventure and romance with what my father was doing and he felt so incredibly strong about it. And it didn't matter what, I mean, Dad always expressed his feelings if you remember. But I also traveled with my father, people don't remember this, my father ran for governor around 1958. He ran for the United States Senate a couple years later when Lyndon Johnson assumed the Vice Presidency. And he would drive around all over the State of Texas in his Chevrolet station wagon and I traveled with him and he would take three Mariachis, my Dad, a guy on a typewriter, I'm serious, that was his press guy on a little typewriter in a

station wagon. And then when the Mariachis would play music I would be there in the background with the maracas. So then I would read that Price Daniel, the Governor, was traveling all over the state of Texas in an airplane, I was not a real great guy to have in that car to say, "Dad, I think we're going to lose." And we did.

But Dad never wished for any of us to enter politics and maybe that's a family secret but he was not keen on any of us entering politics. The most he would say was you know, "Go to law school, and become a lawyer." For my sisters, and this is to all the women and young women that are here, back then you could go to college or university, but it had to be local and you'd probably going to end up being a teacher and that's what my sisters did. But Dad was not interested in any of us growing up to be politicians.

I will tell you now, to get my father's endorsement to run in his place was the hardest endorsement I could get. There were many-- running the primary and everybody was running pictures of themselves with my father. No, that's actually the truth because he knew everybody and they have pictures with him and they have professional relationships. Finally, you know, I said, "Dad, you're going to have to -- people are asking why aren't you endorsing me." "You've got to do this on your own." You see, he always believed that, "You've got to do everything on your own; you've got to do everything on your own." Finally thank God for my mother, she finally convinced my father that "Maybe it'll be a little odd if you didn't endorse your son." So that's what happened and it was wonderful.

But my parents raised all of us to be very independent thinkers and that obviously you know that my voting record wasn't always like my dad's record and that disappointed some and made others very happy. But the whole thing was he raised us to basically look at the facts and figures, make a determination, make a judgment, and make a decision and move forward. Now I always tell politically aspiring Latinas and Latinos that we can't all have a Henry B. Gonzalez as a father but we can all have a Henry B. Gonzalez as a model to encourage and inspire us as public servants and I think Dad is going to be a wonderful example forever when it comes to that.

I want to touch on Latinos today, I'm not going to make this a real partisan issue and I may say some things that I think Democrats would say, "What are you talking about?" But what happened on November 6, you've heard often enough by the pundits that demography is destiny. Now last week's elections only begin to tell the story. We do know that the Hispanic

population grew by 43 percent in the last decade to 50.5 million, that 47.1 percent of the United States population, that was foreign born, is Hispanic. This population growth accounted for 56 percent of our nation's population growth and Janet Murguía knows these numbers and figures; 16.7 percent of the U.S. population is Latino, by 2050 our population will grow to 132 or 133 million or 30 percent of the United States' population.

One out every four counties in the United States doubled their Hispanic population since the year 2000. One in five school children is Hispanic, 92 percent of Hispanics under the age of 18 are United States citizens. Fifty thousand Hispanics turn 18 every month for how many years -- 25 years; 50.4 percent children younger than one- year of age were Hispanic, Black, Asian - American or another minority group. Non-Hispanic Whites will be outnumbered in the United States by 2042. The median age for Whites is 42; at the age of 42 your prime child-bearing years are passed, for Blacks and Asian Americans the median age is in their 30s, for Hispanics it is 28. Four-fifths of seniors are white; Kenneth Johnson of the University of New Hampshire said it this way, 'the population is literally changing before us with the youngest replacing the oldest, this is the first tipping point. The kids are in the vanguard of the change that's coming'.

What about the Latino vote? Now, we've reached the numbers where we can determine the elections throughout our nation including the Presidency. Through participation in the political process, Hispanics can shape public policy. The only question is whether Hispanics can and will participate in the electoral process to the extent necessary to influence policy making. Factors that will determine that: one is beyond anyone's control, one is self-imposed, one is external and one - one more maybe awaiting us in the near future.

The factor that is beyond anyone's control but time will take care of it. We are very young-aged population, not voting age, anybody that's out there Adrian Saenz or Michelle Minguez would know what I'm talking about, and of course not all Latinos are citizens. But given time and given the right kind of legislation you'll see greater empowerment.

Now, the factor within our control is registration and voting and we will look carefully at the analysis of the November 6 election but we already know that in Florida three out of five Latinos voted for President Obama. That Ted Cruz, the newly elected Republican senator from Texas, only received 35 percent of the Latino vote in Texas and over-all President

Obama nationally received 70 percent plus of the Latino vote. If we had 23 million Hispanics eligible to vote on November 6, how many were registered and how many voted. I'm afraid that Latinos once again did not come close to flexing their potential electoral muscle.

Now, the external forces the ones that the Congressional Hispanic Caucus have been dedicated, along with the other minority caucuses, in combating and to the new members please know that this is an on-going effort that demands all of your attention. Throughout our nation's history the ability to exercise one's vote has been denied based on various reasons but - in the final analysis - it is denied to those citizens, social and economic mobility which is seen as a threat to the status quo. Literacy tests and poll taxes were imposed in the name of maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. Of course we know the intended purpose was to suppress or depress voter participation by a select group of voters. Today it may be by different means but it is to achieve the same end and become disguised as the following: redistricting, limiting voter registration, purging voter registration rolls, reducing early voting days and hours and the photo ID.

The last factor, and I'm hopefully it's not awaiting us but I think it will, will be immigration reform without a pathway to citizenship, because you can already hear it. We maybe looked, you know, -- the compromise being we may think of some sort of status, legal status, they are not talking about citizenship. It will be the first time in the United States' history I believe where you have someone that will not be afforded a pathway to citizenship.

Steven King, I mean you know Steve King, the congressman that is so anti-immigrant, the reason they don't or the reason they view the pathway to citizenship is because he believes that all those undocumented immigrants are no more that undocumented Democrats and that is quite sad. And this is where I would say that to have a Republican party that is tone deaf to the demographics and to the emerging population of Latinos in this country is a disservice to us all even as Democrats but especially as Americans.

You need two healthy robust functioning political parties. You don't win on the weakness of another party; you win because your ideas, your efforts are superior to the other good ideas of the opposing party. Maria Anglin is a writer in San Antonio and this is what she wrote, and I thought the most profound thing said, "Who are the biggest losers on November 6. The biggest loser was conservative Latino voter, who didn't want to be

represented by Democrats, but who wouldn't be represented by Republicans." It's just the most profound sentence that appeared in everything, and it was a local writer.

Now what are we going to do; because there's something else's happening, you have people that will say, "We are now going to deny birthright citizenship." No pathway to citizenship, denied birthright citizenship and it's all because of Latinos and the perceive threat that we pose to the American way of life, which is totally ridiculous and you know that. But that's where we are.

Now, there are two perspectives and as I leave Congress, I'm trying to figure how we continue to work to reconcile them. And this is where you come in and I will still continue to be relevant, I hope in this. What was my father doing driving that old Chevrolet station wagon all over Texas seeking public office? This is the Latino perspective; he was seeking inclusion for Latinos and understood assimilation. Dad's colleague the late Congressman Edward Roybal said it best, "Hispanics are not looking for special treatment or cultural separatism. They are seeking self determination and equity."

Others see it a different way. This is the other perspective -- and it's not all Republicans, I think it is the extreme wing of the Republican Party and I'll just say it, it's the Tea Party. Because we see it takes hold of the Republican Party in Texas to the detriment of all Texans. But this is what Harold Meyerson said in the Washington Post, July 13, 2011, you may remember it, now he says, "Republicans," but I would say some within the Republican party, "to be sure have long waged the war on government, but only now it has become apocalyptic and total war. At its root, I suspect, is the fear and loathing that rank and file right wingers feel toward what their government and their nation is inexorably becoming: multi-racial, cosmopolitan and now headed by a president who personifies those qualities. That America is also downwardly mobile is a challenge for all of us, but for the right, the anxiety that our economy understandably invokes is augmented by the politics of racial resentment and fury that the country is no longer theirs. That is not a country whose government they want to pay for and if the apocalypse befalls us, they seem to have concluded, so much the better."

No one wants to have that conversation, you'll remember the President, "We're going to have discussion about race, we're going to have this discussion," no one want to have a discussion but I think what Mr. Morrison is pointing out is where we find ourselves today. And what we are hoping for is that the

Republican party will resist and regain control of its heart and soul and not let it be co-opted by those who truly believe that America is changing in a way that it's not their America, regain our freedom, go back to another time.

If you remember that Latinos are minorities, people will say the good old days for some but they are really the bad old days for us. But we're not going backwards. I believe that Latino leaders, and I'm looking at them and what you do, Mickey, can be the conciliators, we can bridge the divide between two perspectives. We demonstrate that we are qualified, confident and reasonable that Latinos are indispensable and indivisible part of this nation. That all America is interconnected, we depend on one another. That the Latinos' devotion and allegiance to our country is second to none that the success of emerging Latino population means success for everyone and to all America, that may not be Latino, may not be minority. Since you will be depending on us, you must invest in us: education, healthcare, everything because as our population grows so grows America. And if we just understood that I think we would come together.

I'm going to end with some observations, 14 years in Congress, that's not long for many people but for me it has been a wonderful, wonderful experience these are great moments, perks and great advice because I want to sort of end it on a lighter note. The great moments. The great moment was on 9-11 when Republicans and Democrats, because leadership was taken somewhere we don't know where but we were at the Capitol police station and we had no place to go. Then suddenly spontaneously, everybody said, "We're going back to the Capitol." And the police said, "No, you're not going back to the Capitol because then you'll be gathered there. We don't want anyone to be gathered there, things can happen still." We went, Republicans and Democrats, remember, all filled the steps of the Capitol and we sang God Bless America; most moving thing. At that moment, I mean, adversity, a common enemy and such united us. There's got to be a way to regain that spirit again.

The second greatest moment for me was a 'No' vote, not voting to give President George W. Bush authority to invade Iraq because I just never thought they made a convincing case. My greatest 'Yes' vote, the affordable Care Act, we just didn't present it in a way that was acceptable and allowed some to distort it. It was really healthcare insurance reform, where we spread risk and make the product more affordable so that pre-existing conditions can be covered. So maybe someone can cover you for more than a year but you've got to spread the risk.

Perks of being a member of Congress, having primo parking space, now too bad I didn't own a car. So to the members that are coming in, racking up thousands of frequent flyer miles, too bad I had no time to use them but maybe I will now. The best one and this is so shallow of me but I'm guilty, getting to meet Paul McCartney. I'm serious; do you think I'm kidding? The Paul McCartney; having a picture right next to Paul McCartney and at his age, which he's not that much older than I am, he looks a lot better.

Alright for the new members if you're still here, this is the best advice and lessons I ever got. One is going to be quite serious but I'm going to save that to the end, the first one is Congressman Ed Markey's model for questioning a witness at a hearing, "Make sure the answer you want is included in your question." It works every time.

Next, Barney Frank's advise, now listen carefully to this, you guys are coming in, you got to listen to this. "Never write when you can talk, never talk when you can nod, never nod when you can wink." That's good advice especially given the recent headlines and the use of the internet. The most serious of all advice but I would say this whether it's Rubens, Silver, Solomon or anybody and to the new members and specially Joaquin was the Gephardt rule. When I got here, we had freshman orientation and Dick Gephardt was the minority leader and he says, "I'm going to give you advice that's going to make my job a lot harder to be your leader but it's the right advice and it'll make your time here in Congress worthwhile and you'll never look back with regret. When you take your voting card out on the floor, vote your conscience first, vote your district second because no one else represents your district and vote your party last." And Leader Gephardt really meant that, he truly meant that and things have changed drastically and I know we got things reversed.

To my colleagues, to my great staff, to my dear family that I've neglected for so many years and to all of you who had played a role as advocates who have shared a love and respect for the institution of Congress and its essential role in having the voices of all Americans heard, I say from the bottom of my heart, thank you and *Siempre Adelante*, thank you.

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