



**Remarks by Ben Ray Luján
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series
Eagle Leadership Award**

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Ben Ray Luján: Thank you everyone, thank you so much. Mickey, thank you for having me follow both Alicia and Bob. I'll get you back. Senator, thank you for those gracious words and for your leadership, for being an example as we deliberate within the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. The honor that I've had to sit across the table from you, negotiating with President Barack Obama, protecting unaccompanied children and being a conscience when it comes to the treatment of our fellow brothers and sisters. Thank you so much for those kind words.

Alicia, thank you for changing the national conversation and making sure that more people are listening. And Senator Menendez, rest assured. Mitch McConnell is listening, but he does it in the quiet of his home and we will make sure that we

get him to admit it, when we get him to pass the Dream Act with your leadership in the United States Senate. Alicia, it will be your voice that gets many of our colleagues to do the right thing.

Mickey Ibarra, what can I say about the work that you have done? It's been applauded time and time again. From the times that I met you decades ago in New Mexico, the work that you did with my father who was a union ironworker, the former speaker of the New Mexico House of Representatives; our mutual friend, our late brother Robert Rivera. You invited my family into your home, you've changed policy for the good of people in New Mexico. It's an honor to call you a friend and to be here with you.

Another leader is Janet Murguía. I'm not going to get into this because I'm going to leave people out. Fred Humphries, the work that you have done, leaders in your own right. My colleague and chairman of Bold PAC, the great congressman Tony Cárdenas, who is a dear friend that's transforming the way that we engage the Latino community across America. Xochitl Torres Small, who won one of the closest elections in America because of the strength of young voters and Latino voters in New Mexico.

I want to thank some of my team who are with me today as well. Lauren French in the back there, who does all of our political and conversations and comes in and out of the office.

Thanks for your brains and your tenacity, Lauren. Carlos Sanchez, who's part of my leadership team as the Assistant Speaker of the House. And I want to recognize Aaron Trujillo who was our chief of staff at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, who led all of the initiatives.

What I can say publicly as you all know is I was a victim, as the DCCC and the Democratic Party, of a Russian hack in 2016. We charged Aaron Trujillo to ensure that we would not have the same vulnerabilities in 2018. I can tell you under his leadership, there was not a threat that we saw that mirrored what we saw in 2016. So, Aaron thank you for helping us win back the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Mickey, the Latino Leaders Series was built on bringing leaders together. When I look across this room and I see the many friends that I've had the honor of learning from throughout the years, those that have transformed policies, some that I've met today for the first time, some that have been family friends since before I was born. You have a way of bringing people together, making sure that we listen and learn from one another. And that's rare in today's day and age where we're also busy, where we're not all good at prioritizing the time that is so precious.

Alicia challenged us with some significant questions at the close of her remarks, and I hope we all reflect on them because

that's what this is all about. What can we do to make a difference with our advocacy, with our lives, with our policy, with our voices because as I look around this room, many of you are in the room where it happens. You're in the room and you're at the table because you've earned your way there and your voice matters. The question that we all have to ask is how are we going to use that voice?

I grew up on a small farm in Northern New Mexico, 20 miles north of Santa Fe. I'm fourth generation farming that small plot of land. We grew up learning that there was no job too big or too small, that every job mattered. Even after I was elected to Congress and I went home, my father was still serving as the Speaker of the House before he passed away with a bout of stage IV lung cancer. I went home, Senator Menendez, with my shoulders up a little bit and I said, "Mr. Speaker, it's good to be with you," because we're supposed to do some chores that weekend. I said, "You know, I outrank you now, Mr. Speaker. I've been elected to the Congress." I was trying to get out of the chores. He said, "Yes, yes. I helped you get elected to that seat, Ben Ray, but I will remind you, you're the youngest of four children." And he gave me a shovel. We raised animals at the time. Senator, those of you that have ever lived on a small farm and raise animals, you know you have to clean up after them. And those of you that have ever had a shovel and

rubber boots over those pants of yours know that it is not the first shovel that gets you, it's the layer underneath that that quickly humbles you.

What my dad was doing is something that I didn't fully appreciate, and he was teaching me those life lessons. Him and my mom, my mom who retired after 33 years from the local public school district as well. That compassion and everything that they did. They were humble. I don't know too many speakers of any chamber in America that would join their son after about a half hour of having me do it on my own, of putting on his rubber boots, getting his gloves and his shovel and joining me in that same barn that he had me cleaning.

There's something that's been lost with character and integrity in this country. And Lauren is watching intently because I'm not going off the script that's in front of me. I think I was inspired by what was said earlier. The words we use matters, how we treat other people matters. Our standing in America is not just at a crossroads; it's in peril. What are we going to do to change that? We have a room of leaders across America - Democrats, Republicans, independents, and libertarians - all represented in this room. There's not a one of us that agrees with what this president is doing.

So, let's come together, let's stand up to these atrocities of tearing children apart from their families, putting them in

cages. You all saw the same photos that I saw recently of children sleeping on gravel floors, the indentions of those rocks on their face, sleeping on floors that you would not walk on without shoes on your feet. I hope those images move you to speak up, to say something again if you've been part of the conversation. And if you have not, I hope this moves you to join. Because the only way that we're going to stop the way this president treats people inhumanelly in America is by saying no more, not on our watch, by using our voices and standing up, and showing up and holding people accountable. Are you with me in that call?

Now, I want you to know, as Bob said, and I'll close with this as we talk about the intricacies of policy. We now have a team in the United States House of Representatives to do that, a team of first. I was honored to work with Speaker Pelosi and to lead the efforts of the DCCC in earning the support of voters across America where faith had been lost. Voters across the Midwest, Latinos and Latinas, African-American voters, Asian American, Pacific Islander voters, members of union families across America that felt that the system had left them and have been ignoring them and that they weren't invited to be at the table. Under the leadership of Dan Sena, our former executive director at the DCCC, we did something that had never been done. We've put substantial investments in reaching out to Latino and

Latina land next voters across America and I will tell you more people from our community voted in the midterms than ever before in our nation's history.

We have to show up. We have to speak right to them, make sure people know that we celebrate our community. But we're not a monolithic community. The same Spanish that's spoken in my home in New Mexico, which is Spanglish and broken, is not the same Spanish that is spoken in Senator Menendez's home. We all have different experiences. Our barbeques are both incredible, but they have a little bit of different food on the menu.

That matters in making sure that we continue to reach out to people across the country. We elected the first two Native American women to the United States House of Representatives. A third of the new freshmen class is a person of color. Another first with the most diverse class we've ever elected. We elected 38 new women to the U.S. House of Representatives, the largest block of women ever elected in our nation's history. Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia are the first two Latinas elected from the state of Texas. And the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Mr. Chairman, with the support of Bold PAC and the initiatives we worked on together added ten new members, giving Latinos across the country an even more powerful voice within our government. By the way, the caucus is now the largest it's

ever been in our nation's history and we're just getting started.

So, look I'm an eternal optimist, I see opportunity around every corner even with the roadblocks and the barriers that are sometimes put in front of us. You keep fighting your way into those rooms, to the executives who are here, continue to diversify who is at your table of decision makers. Well, we proved this year through American politics, for races for the House of Representatives across America, is that candidates of color can win in communities that are majority-minority districts across America. We showed that when you diversify the campaign managers, and those raising the resources and making those strategic decisions every day, when they are diverse, you have stronger outcomes and better outcomes and you get more people elected. You understand what's happening across the country.

Let's make sure that we continue to build on your successes and make that a reality in every company in America, every nonprofit in America, and in every state and local chamber, in every mayoral election. And once, Senator Menendez, we flipped the United States Senate, we will make sure that we have a Supreme Court that would be more representative of the United States of America.

To all of our friends, thank you. Mickey, for the honor of allowing me to be here. I'm sorry that I went longer, I took us overschedule. I was inspired by what Alicia said. And I will close with that again, reflect on those questions, know your purpose and know that each and every one of us has a responsibility. And the way that my father challenged me before he passed - to make a positive difference in someone's life every day. Sometimes, that's just a smile. And this year, Bob, we proved that you don't got to be a jerk to win at the DCCC. Amen.