

Latino Leaders Network  
LLM LA 2025 Chairman's Award  
California State Senator Lena Gonzalez

Lena Gonzalez: Thank you so much to my good friend and assembly member Lisa Calderon. Thank you so much to the Latina Leaders Network led by the Honorable Mickey Ibarra and the wonderful, wonderful board; as well as my friends that I can say that I've shared the stage with. And congratulations to you, Lupe, and Jose Antonio. Let's give them a big round of applause.

Now you know I'm a state senator. It's been about almost seven years now in this role as state senator. Prior to that, I was on the city council and worked at Microsoft. So I do have a corporate lens as well.

Prior to that, I'll tell you my story. I was a Cal State Long Beach grad, an LMU grad. I'm the daughter of an immigrant mother who came here very young from Aguascalientes in Mexico. The daughter of a dad who is a truck driver, Teamster Union, for over 30 years and also a mom at the age of 19. I was told so many times through my life you would never make it and given so many examples of why I would not make it. I'm here to say, well, Latino Leaders Network has told me I have made it. So I made it.

It's really incredible to have this opportunity to be

recognized, but really I lead a caucus of 38 members in the Latino caucus. We started off about over 50 years ago with five members. We are now 38 members that represent every single piece and corner of the state of California, from the Bay Area to the Imperial Valley to inland to the Southern California and the Central Coast.

We will now have two Latino leaders leading our State Senate and leading our State Assembly. We have the most Latina representation that we have ever had in the Latino caucus ever. I'm proud of these Latino leaders this past year authoring over 12 bills most of which focused and met the moment. Most of which were ensuring that we were fighting against Trump, but we also had a plan.

Much of that was ensuring that we had requirements for judicial warrants and court orders at our very most sensitive places - hospitals where children should feel safe, K through 12 school - ensuring that we built partnerships with Mayor Bass and our other state, and local, and federal electees to ensure that we knew that we weren't just alone but we were doing this together.

I want to thank my colleagues in the Assembly in the API and Black Caucus, because it was also about unity, ensuring that we weren't doing this alone. Immigrant stories are not just Latino stories. They're API stories. They're black

stories. They're LGBTQ stories. We needed to work in unity. So over a dozen bills, we were party to many amicus briefs and press conferences, and all the while individually many of us are feeling very lost and very challenged, sometimes feeling hopeless.

But we had to put on a good face when we got to Sacramento and say to ourselves, if we feel this way even with the title, we've got to get up and keep moving for the so many immigrant communities - the undocumented, the folks that feel that they don't have a voice, the ones that have been kidnapped. Whether you are a legal permanent resident, a U.S. citizen or undocumented, we had to be their voice. So I'm so very grateful for this Latino Legislative Caucus for this past year in fighting on, continuing to move, continuing to be a voice.

Next year we're coming back with a vengeance to make sure that this progress does not discontinue. This progress moves forward with every single one of you here. I know you all have been fighting very hard, but now we've got to do this collectively and more strategic. We have to know and let our communities know that we are not going to back down.

I will stop by saying thank you so much to Soyla Fernandez for the nomination. It is her fault that we are here but I'm so very grateful because, in Latina leadership, it's not so much to say that I've made it; therefore, I got to keep moving.

You've got to look back and you've got to look side to side to make sure all of our leaders could move forward together. So thank you so very much.

Mickey, you had said that we have to be on time. I'm also grateful that you didn't put centerpieces out because this is Latino Leadership Network and we're going to steal all the centerpieces if we could like a *quinceñera*. So thank you so much. I appreciate the honor.

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