



The Antonio Villaraigosa Leadership Award
Remarks of Mayor Karen Bass
The Mayflower, Washington DC
January 17, 2024

Karen Bass: Good evening everyone. I have to tell you this is very overwhelming, very overwhelming. It's overwhelming to sit and listen to people talk about you. Those of you that know me know that's different.

I have to say that Mickey, right after I was sworn in, I went to the luncheon and that was when we met the first time. You came to my office with Ruben and you were telling me about this dinner and you were telling me about the award and I was like, oh wow, that's just wonderful, that's just wonderful.

Then you told me I was going to be the recipient of the award. Really, I was taken aback. One because I had been mayor for about five minutes but two, you explained to me it wasn't about that, it was about a body of work and how I had lived my life and so I just want to thank you so much. I'm very humbled

to receive this and knowing all of the people that came before me who have been recipients of this award. So thank you very much.

Nanette, I do miss my colleagues in Congress. I really do because you know when you serve in Congress you build real relationships because you live together really. It's kind of like being in college - you work here during the week and go home on the weekend. I'm very proud of you and the fact that the caucus has grown to 40 members. In my time in Congress, I think that's probably double what it was in the 12 years that I served in Congress so thank you so much and all the other members of Congress. I know what it means after working all day to come to events. So thank you very much for your words.

And Tom, you have to come back again. I'll tell you there's parts of skid row that are a little better now as we've been getting people off the street. Just really have appreciated knowing you and working with you in your various roles and then it was very exciting to go to the White House a few months ago and see you right back there right where you belong serving in this role. We look forward to seeing you come back to Los Angeles again very soon. Thank you.

And Senator Padilla, what you didn't mention about when you were elected to Council I remember you were the youngest member I believe in history to have been elected to Council and become

Council president. Antonio and I were laughing because we remember you on 911. We remember what you had to do, where you were leading the city because the mayor at the time was actually out of town. I remember watching you do those press conferences every morning and I'm sure you would have never imagined that you would have been having to lead the city after a national and an international disaster but it was an honor to serve with you in Sacramento and to see you move on and go not just directly to the Senate, Secretary of State, change voting in the state of California where we don't have to worry about voter suppression because everybody has a ballot mailed to them so you don't even have to leave your house to vote in California. That was under your leadership and then to see you ascend to the U.S. Senate. Absolutely been an honor watching you on TV and the way you fight the good fight. I know it's tough over there in the Senate but we're all very, very proud of you.

And to my brother from another mother. I love that guy we have known each other since we were barely out of our teens and we grew up together, we grew up in a time when collaboration was a part of how we were raised. We were activists as teenagers, post civil rights, looking at all of the international struggles going on, the liberation and independence battles in Asia, in Africa and Latin America.

We always identified with other people's struggles because we felt like they were struggling overseas. We were here and we felt the unity in our struggles and then over time, we watched a lot of people from those struggles come to the United States. I certainly remember the influx of folks from Central America during the independence movements in Central America.

As he mentioned he was in East LA, I was in South LA we were really more on the radical side. He wouldn't say that as he was in Casa, and I was in various organizations and we were all fighting for social change, but he was the first one of my group of activists that decided to run for office.

I remember saying to you, Antonio you're going to run for office, you think they're going to let you do that. I mean you know they're going to find out about you and I'm not sure they're really going to let you do it. He was like, oh Karen, I can do it. I think it'll be okay, and you did it and we were blown away, and he won.

I remember going up and visiting him in Sacramento especially when he was speaker and I barely understood what that role was and watching you a speaker, I didn't think about it, but I've kind of followed in your footsteps and serving as Speaker during a very tumultuous time.

I remember going back and visiting you and you telling me that you were going to run for mayor. I'm like you're going to

run for mayor Antonio, you're going to be able to do that. And did it he did - he did it in an amazing way and was an amazing leader and a lot of what you did as mayor whether you're talking about transportation, Stephanie Wiggins who is our CEO from LA Metro.

A lot of what I get to cut ribbons about is work that you did as mayor and I am very excited and honored every time because he laid an incredible path and legacy for the work that you did in LA. So, mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. You should give him a round of applause.

I heard when someone got that award, they looked at that award and they said "Oh boy, just what I want, an award with Antonio Villaraigosa face on it". Didn't you tell me somebody said that. Well, I want you to know that I am glad I have an award with Antonio Villaraigosa face on it and I want you to know that in my office, it's going to be right next to an award that I received with Tom Bradley's face.

Because in the time that we grew up, again it was in our DNA to unite and just like he referenced, it's about math. If you look at the demographics in the United States, we are a country that is more and more becoming like the State of California, majority people of color. If we join forces, nothing can stop us and that is the basis of our unity now, but the other basis of our unity is our collective history together.

So when I started Community Coalition, it was actually 32 years ago, our focus was really on raising the next generation of leaders. We started it as an African American and Latino organization and we focused on recruiting high school students because I was a high school student, actually I was a middle school student when I first got involved in politics. The first campaign I was involved in I was in junior high school. I forged my mother's name as a Precinct Captain for Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign, and I went out and walked the precincts.

I've always believed if you look at the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power movement, the Latino movement, the Asian movement, it's always been led by young people, and I've always believed that it doesn't matter how young you are, you can get involved.

So we started by recruiting high school students because I felt like the way to prevent gangs and drug involvement was to get people involved in political activism. So by now, 32 years later, we've raised a couple of generations and what we did with the young people was we taught them our history, our collective history.

If you look at during the period of enslavement in the United States where did a lot of enslaved Americans go? They fled to Mexico and hearing about the oppression that both groups

face it was a no-brainer for African Americans and Latinos to combine forces. I'm proud to say that a couple of those activists that we recruited when I was first in the organization and they were 13, 14 years old. Now they are part of my staff. Actually, I don't know if the staff that's here knows that but the inside saves the work that we do on the streets getting people off the streets. They're not youngsters anymore. They're in their mid-40s.

The whole point was to raise another generation of activists who would understand the point of our unity. As our country is changing in demographics, there's a lot of people that are uncomfortable around that.

What we went through during those four years of the last Administration, we still suffer from the attacks on immigrants. In the future we will look at this as one of the worst moments in U.S. history. The idea that families would be separated, that children would be taken, and I believe that there are still hundreds of these children that have never found their way back to their parents and will grow up wondering how they got in the United States. Those issues hit at both of us because our legacies are joined together. I think about the last time there was major immigration reform, which was in the 80's, and we would have those big rallies downtown and people would come

from Chinatown and South LA and East LA because we understood the unity of our struggles. To me that's a core part of who I am. It is about always struggling for social and economic change. To do that if you really believe in that then you know that it's not just about who you are as an individual it's about something that is much bigger and greater than you and so you want to invest in that next generation because you know that the movement for social change never ends.

We make some advances, like we certainly have and then we have people that try to pull us back. Right now we're fighting for our collective histories because we have states that are literally trying to make our histories illegal. It is important that we always fight on behalf of each other.

I will say too just on a personal note our unity is very personal to me since my children are Latino, my grandchildren are Latino, my late husband was a leader in MEChA and for those folks that have been around for a while, you might remember La Raza Unida Party. He was in charge of La Raza Unida Party in the San Fernando Valley probably when you were in elementary school, he was heading it up.

It is not just political, it is not just professional, it is personal, and I will tell you that receiving this award is very personal to me and means the world. Thank you so much Mickey. Thank you for all you do.