



**Remarks by
Mayor Sylvester Turner
Tribute to Mayors Event
Antonio Villaraigosa Award**

**January 23rd, 2019
The Mayflower Hotel
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Sylvester Turner: Thank you. Thank you so very much. Thank you. Look, let me just start off. First let me acknowledge Mickey Ibarra. Mickey, thank you so very much for being the founding chairman of the Latino Leaders Network, and for your leadership, for your dedication. The group came to Houston last year. We were honored to host you then. So let me thank you, please give it up to Mickey one more time.

Look, let me just say that I am very moved to receive the award in the name of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Thank you. When he was mayor and I wasn't a mayor, I was in the legislature. I was following what you were doing out in LA. And I'll come back to a few things but you have not just inspired Latinos, you've inspired African Americans, Asians,

Anglos, you name it, through your own leadership. So thank you, and I very much appreciate it.

To receive this award in your name just means a great, great deal. To all of the mayors who are here for the U.S. Conference of Mayors, all the mayors, let me just say, good evening to all of you. To those who are the previous recipients of this award, let me certainly acknowledge each one of you.

To those who were responsible for getting me to this event and receiving this award, Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia, you and I have known each other for a long, long time. I want to thank you for your leadership in the City of Houston. You've been on the frontline, and I thank you for having a significant hand in causing me to be where I am today. So thank you Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia.

State Senator Carol Alvarado is in Austin with the Texas legislature so she is not here today. But I do want to acknowledge her and Harris County commissioner Adrian Garcia. I certainly want to acknowledge his role that he played in me receiving this award.

I do have a council member who is very instrumental in receiving this award, and since he votes on my budget and everything else I certainly want to give him special attention. He was not at the council table this morning, but the reason why he wasn't at the council table, he came ahead of me to be here

tonight. And let me tell you, that means a great deal and I don't take that lightly. Council Member Robert Gallegos, thank you, man. I appreciate you. Thank you.

Look, let me just say that I have the privilege of being the mayor of a great city. And so many Houstonians, Commissioner Rodney Ellis is here. And then for *the* Congresswoman of the 18th Congressional District to take the time to be here as well, I cannot say enough, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. Thank you so very, very much.

I will say to you what my mom was dealing with all the time is - there are nine kids, she forgot all of our names. But there's one person whose name she didn't forget. She was watching CNN and we were walking through and she started saying Sheila Jackson Lee, Sheila Jackson Lee. Sheila Jackson Lee was the last name my mama remembered. So I don't know what that was all about, but thank you, Sheila Jackson Lee.

There are a number of people who are here from Houston, I would be remiss. I know if you just stand where you are because I appreciate all of you who have travelled with me to come here from Houston, please, please stand because I appreciate you and I certainly want to thank you all so very much. Thank you all. Thank, thank you all. Thanks, Mike. Thanks.

Look, the reality is even as mayor you can't do anything by yourself. I happen to be the mayor where in terms of

demographics, 40 - 45 percent of my city is Hispanic, 40 to 45 percent. By the year 2050, we project that the percentage will probably be close to 60 percent. If you take Harris County, one of the largest counties in the United States, probably the third, I think about the third largest county in the United States, 50 percent of the population under 20 is Hispanic. And for the first time in the history of Harris County, we have a Latina as the county judge of Harris County.

No offense to any other mayor, but I happened to be the mayor of the most diverse city in the United States of America. One of four Houstonians is foreign born, and the reality is, if you're going to get anything accomplished, you got to work in collaboration with others. You just cannot do it by yourself. And when you are in a diverse city, as my dad would say, you can be diverse, separate, segregated and apart. The question is, can you be diverse and be inclusive? And that's why it's important for the police chief of the City of Houston to be Chief Art Acevedo; the fire chief to be Samuel Peña; the head of my education initiative to be Juliet Stipeche; the head of regulatory affairs to be Tina Paez. And the list goes on and on and on.

It is important for people to see themselves around the table of decision-making. It's not enough. It's not enough just to say, we are diverse unless you are diverse in the

boards, the commissions, the department heads, the people who are running your operation, diverse in your money, you're just not where it needs to be.

And quite frankly, I'm not Hispanic, but by DNA is *bueno*. I think it's fairly good. It's important to recognize when we are talking about children - it's not those children. They are our children. It doesn't matter what they look like. It doesn't matter where they come from. It doesn't matter what their language is. It doesn't matter whether they are documented or undocumented. It doesn't matter whether you were living in the City of Houston for 30 years or 30 minutes. I am your mayor, the *alcalde*, and I represent who you are.

And so if you need help, I'm your mayor. If somebody is trying to deport you, I'm your mayor. If you want a strong education, I'm your mayor. And if you need city services, I'm your mayor. We just celebrated -- hold on, because I got it. I only have a couple of minutes and Mickey is going to pull on my coattail.

We just celebrated Martin Luther King Day the other day. As a kid, I watched him. I listened to his speeches and I would take his speeches and go into my mom's bedroom and then I would practice on those speeches. There was a certain segment, one quotation that I've carried with me all of my life. He said, fleecy locks and black complexion cannot forfeit nature's claim

that affections may dwell in black and brown and white the same. And were I so tall as to reach the pole or to grasp at the ocean at a span, I must be measured by my soul for the mind is the standard of every man. And I would include every woman.

The reality is that it doesn't matter how we got here. We are all here now. And it's important that we make sure that all of our children get the education that they need. When a Houston independent school district was in trouble with some of their schools, we looked around to try to find the model that would work without trying to take over the district, without trying to push, go against public education. We looked for a model where we could work with the schools, the underperforming schools. We looked all over the country. We sent a group made up [sounds like] to LA. We looked at the model that you put in place some ten years ago, LA United.

And we discovered that, that was a model that would work well for the City of Houston. We went there. We came back, we designed a non-profit essentially after the model that you created based on the passion you had for all of our children and lifting our kids from where they used to be or where they were to give them an opportunity. Someone asked me, mayor, with all of the things on your plate, why would you get involved in an educational system and take on these battles that you really do not need? And what I said to them, Mayor Villaraigosa, I am the

product of two parents, neither one of them graduated from high school. A dad who died of cancer when he was 30, a mom who is a maid, never learned how to drive, never graduated from high school, a maid at the old Rice Hotel in downtown Houston, but she reared nine kids all by herself.

When people would come to the door selling books, my mom would buy almost every book that somebody was selling because what she said, I want you all to have a better life than what I have had. And she said, I'm cleaning these rooms, these hotels, people I don't know not because I want to but because I have no choice. And I'd clean them all day 24/7 if it means you're all getting a better education.

When it came time for me to go to school, it was my mom, that maid, who had good credit, that signed the loan papers that enabled me to get where I am today. I didn't get here by accident. I didn't get here because I'm so smart. I didn't get here because I'm so gifted or talented. I got here on the backs of moms and dads who did not graduate from high school but who knew the key to success was education.

We have an obligation to all of our kids and especially children of color to give them the opportunity to succeed, and regardless of the pain we have to go through. These are our children and they deserve our very best. I'm following your

lead and I'm following the path that you took to give these kids a better chance.

I want to thank you for your honor, but do not just give the honor to me. Give it to a whole lot of janitors, and maids and fast food workers who are simply asking for the opportunity to succeed. And because of them and their participation in the battle, a Sylvester Turner is in D.C tonight receiving the Antonio Villaraigosa Award, and I thank you for it.

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