



**Remarks of Janet Murguía, NCLR President and CEO
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Before we start tonight, I want to take a moment to talk about one of NCLR's core principles. The National Council of La Raza was founded to be, and remains to this day, a nonpartisan organization. And despite the increasingly polarized politics of the past ten years, we have stayed true to that commitment.

I know that opponents of immigration reform like to paint us as partisan, but I can assure you we are not. We welcome our champions from every faith, creed, color, and political persuasion. We welcome all advocates who believe in the American Dream and see it alive and reborn in our families today.

Standing up for our community is not a partisan activity. As many of you know, I have not been shy about calling out presidents from either party. Advocating for better health care, better education, better housing, and civil rights is not a partisan activity. Defending the powerless against the powerful is not so much a statement of our politics as it is a statement of our humanity. It is also, at its core, our job.

Every year, at this time, we gather in this beautiful space to celebrate our champions. And it is always wonderful to see so many people—so important to our community—gathered in one place. That alone is a cause for celebration.

But this year is different from past years.

This year is being defined by a new president who rose to office on a tide of nativist rhetoric. Whether by consequence or intent, his path to the White House was paved by painting our community as outsiders and laying the nation's problems at our feet. We are the scapegoat, the straw man, the stalking horse for a president whose single most enduring campaign symbol was a wall between the United States and Mexico.

Unfortunately, it wasn't just rhetoric. In February, on the 75th anniversary of the U.S. internment of Japanese Americans during World War II—one of our nation's darkest moments—the Trump administration called for doubling the number of enforcement agents to round up and deport the undocumented living among us.

Now, the United States already spends *more* on immigration enforcement than on *all* other federal law enforcement agencies combined. That includes the DEA, the FBI, the ATF, the Secret Service, and the Federal Marshals Service. There is no rational justification for this.

There is only one reason to ask for such a huge increase. The administration plans to mobilize an unprecedented mass deportation force. And despite the president's rhetoric, this is not just about getting "the bad ones out." The new priorities for enforcement now target

virtually all undocumented persons. It sends a chilling message to communities across America.

The president likes to paint the face of the undocumented as criminals, but the overwhelming majority of them are not. They are mothers and fathers—hardworking men and women trying to make a better life for their families. They are not the enemy. They are members of our churches. They are neighbors on our streets. They are people we know and value—members of our family. They are not a threat to our communities or our country. Forcibly removing them will take a staggering human, financial and spiritual toll.

Consider this: there are nearly six million American children born in the United States who have at least one parent who is undocumented. What happens to those children when their parents are taken away? What happens to their families when their breadwinner is deported? Are they better off? Will they be better prepared to contribute to our society? Our economy? Our government?

Imagine if your father or your mother was taken from you at an early age. How would that have affected your life? Where would that road have taken you? Would you be the person you are today?

These are not abstract questions. In this administration's first immigration sweep, José Escobar was deported after showing up for a routine meeting with immigration officials. José, who came to this country when he was fifteen years old, is married to Rose, an American citizen. He is the father to two beautiful children including a two-year-old toddler and a precocious seven-year-old boy named Walter. They

too are American citizens. José has no criminal record, yet he has been permanently separated from his family and sent to a country he has never seen as an adult. Who benefits from that kind of policy?

With us on Capitol Hill yesterday was 13-year-old Fatima Avelica who watched from the back seat of her family's car as her father Romulo was arrested after dropping her sister off at school. How does making that child suffer advance our nation's interest?

Ask yourself another question: How will ICE know who is a citizen and who is not?

I can tell you how. Because we have been down this road before. In Arizona, under the racial profiling regime of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, we were *all* suspect. We were *all* asked to stop and show our papers. We were *all* considered aliens in our own communities. It is no surprise that at a recent ICE raid, Bernardo Medina, an American citizen from Denver was incarcerated for days even though he produced a Colorado ID and identified himself as a U.S. citizen. The ICE agents told him, "You don't look like you were born in Montrose."

That is the future that awaits us. It is as unthinkable as it is unnecessary. Illegal immigration numbers are down. Since 2008, more people have left the United States than have arrived. And immigrants overall commit far fewer crimes than native-born citizens. This administration's greatest budgetary priorities are based on a myth. The immigration crisis is no more real than the wiretapping of Trump Tower or the bogus claim of three million cases of voter fraud. There is no need for a wall

and even less need for a mass deportation force. Yet this president will bankrupt our country's investments in housing, health care, education, school lunches, Medicaid, and even Meals on Wheels to pay for them.

This is an existential moment. If we do not act to end the assault, if our community does not rise up to challenge it, if we do not inspire our allies to join us and galvanize the public to act, millions of families will be ripped apart on an unprecedented scale; American children will be left behind without their parents, and our communities will feel like police states.

Let's be clear—this is not just an immigration issue. It is not just a Latino issue. This gets to the very core of who we are as a nation and what we stand for. It is outrageous to purposefully tear apart families and leave children to fend for themselves. The America we know protects the vulnerable. Our America strengthens families. Our America doesn't gut the budget for programs serving low-income people to finance mass deportations.

Coretta Scott King once said, "Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won; you earn it and win it in every generation."

I ask you to join me in that struggle. Help me end the assault on our civil rights. Help me end the assault on our families. Help me end the assault on our children.

Join us to stop Congress from funding mass deportation. Don't let your senators and congressmen turn a blind eye. Call them; visit them, and take our message home with you to their districts. Show

them the consequences of their inaction by telling your stories and shining a light on kids like Fatima and Walter who they are abandoning. Make them accountable for the harm to our families.

To our Affiliates, I ask you to keep the faith. Together, we are the vehicle for achieving the hopes and dreams of our community. We are the best chance to create change.

We have big dreams. No one—no matter how powerful—can deny us those dreams. But we have to come together and unify to fight for them.

Now, more than ever, our work to protect and defend our families is essential. But we need to do more than play defense. We must fight to keep what we have earned, expand what we have learned, and explore the farthest threshold of our power as citizens of the United States. We need to respond to this moment. We must band together to speak up for our dreams and our future. We need to march and demonstrate the power of our numbers. We need to increase citizenship in our community. We need to register voters. We need to get out the vote, and challenge our people to run for office. That is the foundation of our future. Every election matters. Every vote matters. Every voice matters.

We are a community of 57 million people strong. Our voice will be heard. I promise you, our voices will be heard.