

## 2018 UNIDOS US CAPITAL AWARDS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE | MARCH 22, 2018

Good evening, and welcome to the 2018 UnidosUS Capital Awards dinner!

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our founding. In 1968, Ernesto Galarza, Herman Gallegos, and Julian Samora joined together to create the Southwest Council of La Raza, uniting our original seven Affiliates representing the Mexican-American community.

Today, we are a Pan-Latino organization that can claim nearly 300 affiliates across the country.

We are an American institution, and the work we do each and every day on education, health, housing, workforce development, civil rights, immigration, and economic empowerment is a direct reflection of our founders' dream and the vision of our longtime leader, Raul Yzaguirre.

Raul led this organization for over 30 years, elevating our community by offering encouragement, opportunity, and direction. He is a true innovator and a trailblazer, and a champion of civil rights.

Please join me in offering our deepest gratitude to UnidosUS President and CEO Emeritus, Raul Yzaguirre, who is here with his wife Audrey.

Tonight marks our first awards celebration as UnidosUS. To us, *Unidos* is more than just a name. *Unidos* is a call to action for our community to come together, and an invitation for others to join us.

It is a statement about our future, our growing strength as a community, and our ultimate engagement as citizens of this great country.

Together, *Unidos*, we will build a society where—no matter what we look like, how we pray, where we come from, who our parents are, or how our sexuality is expressed—all of us can live, worship, and work together as we pursue happiness as equals—as Americans.

That's a tall order... We definitely have a ways to go.

It seems *especially* true given this past year under this administration.

Whether it is their abandonment of the Dreamers or the abandonment of Puerto Rico after the most devastating hurricane in 90 years—whether it is attacks on our healthcare and education or on our civil liberties and our right to vote—the threats to our community are both real and alarming.

Yet, as I consider how our community has responded to this challenge, as I think about the courage, the tenacity and the purpose I have seen demonstrated day in and day out to protect and defend our community, I could not be more confident about our future as an organization.

Together, we have worked to make a real difference in people’s lives both on the ground with our Affiliates and in the halls of Congress and state houses where policies are made.

Six months ago, Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. By almost any measure, the federal government failed.

We pushed the administration, demanding increased resources and funding be delivered to ensure that people on the island received critical supplies and help.

Our government has a responsibility to do more for its nearly 4 million U.S. citizens on the island.

The president even criticized the efforts of Puerto Ricans to help themselves. He could not have been more wrong.

We have seen first-hand the incredible work that the residents of Puerto Rico and our Affiliates like One Stop Career Center of Puerto Rico have done on the island. In a moment of crisis, they stepped up. They changed people’s lives.

On the mainland, we had more work to do. In the wake of the disaster, nearly 300,000 Puerto Ricans fled the island for the eastern seaboard.

With just a moment’s notice, Marucci Guzman of our Affiliate, Latino Leadership, mobilized her staff and a volunteer force to establish a response center in the Orlando International Airport.

Over the course of the next few months they provided assistance to some 8500 families fleeing the storm's devastation. They helped people find relatives on the mainland. They helped children enroll in school, and connected evacuees with food assistance-programs, job fairs and health services.

Their tireless efforts to support the Puerto Rican community along with those by our Affiliates in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio, are examples of the generosity, tenacity and resiliency of our organization.

With us tonight is Marucci Guzman, Executive Director of Latino Leadership. Please join me in giving Marucci a round of applause and our thanks.

Here in Washington, we had a crisis of our own. We saw this administration double down on its policies of aggressive deportation. Rather than target "murderers and drug dealers" as the president claimed, ICE broadened their sweeps to pick up anyone detainable and began tearing families apart all across the country.

A year ago at this awards dinner, I introduced a 13-year-old girl from California named Fatima Avelica. She attends one of the schools within our Affiliate Network, run by Executive Director Ricardo Mireles. A month earlier, Fatima's father Romulo was taking her to school. After dropping off her sister Yuleni, Romulo was arrested by ICE in front of his two daughters.

You know, Romulo is a hard-working man. He and his wife Norma are very involved with their daughters' school. Romulo coaches Fatima, who likes to run marathons. Fatima captured her father's arrest on her cellphone and posted the clip online. The sound of her weeping while her father was being handcuffed in front of her was heartbreaking. The clip went viral. It put a human face on the brutality of this administration's enforcement policies.

With the local leadership of our Affiliate Academia Avance, we helped Fatima and Yuleni take their story to Congress. Together we helped shine a light on the tragedy unfolding across America.

These were not drug dealers. These were not rapists. This was a father raising his American children to be good students, good people and ultimately good citizens. What could be gained by separating a father from his children?

With the national support of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, along with Senators Kamala Harris and Bob Menendez, we exposed this travesty on Capitol Hill. Although frightened, Fatima was very brave; she stood up at a national news conference to tell her story. And she spoke of the pain she felt and the fear she had of losing her father. When she was finished, many of us, including the senators, were too choked up to speak.

We all made a promise to help keep Romulo with his family. I'm delighted to announce Romulo has been reunited with his family and is here tonight with his daughters Fatima and Yuleni. Please join me in welcoming the Avelica family and Ricardo Mireles, of Academia Avance.

Romulo's detainment is a symbol of the perversity and brutality of this administration's policies. But his presence tonight is also a symbol of our commitment to protecting and defending each and every family at risk. It also speaks to the power of our partnerships with our Affiliates.

There are millions of families just like Romulo's. Their stories are a reminder of why the work we do is so important and why we cannot afford to fail.

We live in challenging times. And because we live in challenging times, we are called to do more.

Like Marucci, like Fatima, like Ricardo, like Chef José Andrés, we must step up to face the challenges that confront us. We have so much at stake. We cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and wait for someone else to step forward.

We must demand more from ourselves, our allies, and each other. Each of us must be engaged. We must raise our voices in protest. We must challenge our government to do more—to be better.

And most of all, we must vote. The November elections are upon us and we can take nothing for granted.

Whether they are at the local, the state or the national level, they are all vital to our future. Every. Election. Matters.

To harness the energy and activism of our community, yesterday we launched a campaign called “the Power of 18.”

One out of every four Americans under the age of 18 is Hispanic. We are asking all Latinos turning 18 to register to vote on their birthdays. We are asking Hispanics of all ages to help register their family and friends. We are asking Latino professionals to donate enough to register 18 new voters. And we are asking everyone to contact 18 citizens eligible to vote and encourage them to go to the polls.

*Tenemos que decir "presente" en las calles, en el Congreso, en las casillas.*

I have a great deal of confidence in our future. In recent weeks, I have met with students across the country and this week with young people participating in our Leaders in Action Summit. Their energy, their enthusiasm, their passion empowers us as much as it empowers them.

In their eyes, I see what the next fifty years of this organization will bring. They understand that representation matters. They understand that advocacy means raising your hand to say enough.

They understand that if you want to stop the violence in our schools, sometimes you have to stand up and walk out. They know that to be heard, sometimes you need to say “Time's Up.”

We must all be so courageous. We must all be so purposeful. And we must all be so tenacious as we rise to the challenge.

*En la unidad está la fuerza, y en la fuerza el poder. ¡Adelante!*