

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2019 UNIDOS US CAPITAL AWARDS | MARCH 26

Good evening! And welcome to the 2019 Capital Awards dinner!

I first want to acknowledge my predecessor, Raul Yzaguirre, who led this organization for 30 years, and his wife, Audrey.

We are delighted tonight to celebrate all of our worthy award winners: Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, Al Cardenas, and Mónica Ramírez. We are grateful to each for their service to our community... especially in such challenging times.

And let's be honest; we live in challenging times.

As we enter the third year of President Trump's term in office we face a doubling down of his assault on our community. He has put us at center stage of his divisive politics and weaponized the debate over our community's future. I take great pride in our community's response to these challenges.

We have fought back.

We have used truth to counter falsehood, and compassion to counter hate.

We have shared our stories to show the face of those impacted by the president's policies.

And we have woken a strong spirit in our community to capture our voice and more importantly... our vote.

The results of this past midterm election, especially, give me hope. It was a tremendous joy to recognize that—finally—a great number of people elected to serve our country actually look like the people of our country.

In my 15 years with this organization, we have undertaken some important work. We have championed the tremendous contributions our community has made to this country throughout its history. We have helped millions of families gain access to education, health care, economic empowerment, citizenship and the protection of their civil rights. We have worked hard to ensure that our community is represented in the media, in business and at every level of government.

But the one priority you will find in nearly every speech we give, in every event we host and in every endeavor we undertake is a call for our community to vote, to engage our government,

and to participate in our democracy. According to the Pew Research Center, 2020 will mark the first time in history that Hispanics make up the largest racial or ethnic minority in the electorate.

UnidosUS has played an important role in that empowerment. Since 2008, we have led voter outreach, training programs, canvassed communities, launched a mobile voter registration app and galvanized young people online. In all, we have registered over 700,000 eligible new voters.

This past year alone, we launched the “Power of 18 Campaign” to engage a growing voting bloc: Latino youth. Working with 63 UnidosUS Affiliates in 15 states, we reached a quarter of a million people with voting rights and election information and registered an additional 81,000 new voters.

With us tonight are three high school students who helped in that effort. They are here attending our UnidosUS Changemakers Summit with the HOLA Youth Foundation, in Ohio. All three participated in our High School Democracy Project and were an active part of our canvassing team in Cleveland. In all, they helped register over 1,000 new voters.

From “Facing History New Tech High School,” please join me in welcoming Jose Rios, Elisa Medina, and Rosemary Gramajo Quiñones. Jose is a senior at FHNT, and is this year's valedictorian of his class. He has also received a full scholarship to attend Ohio State University.

Elisa is also a senior. Next year she will study business administration at Cleveland State University. Elisa and Jose voted for the first time last November, walking together in a group from the school to the board of elections.

Meri is a junior. This is Meri's second time in Washington. She traveled to the White House with her soccer team when she was eleven. These future leaders came to our summit to learn how they can be more effective working for change. They want to put into practice what they learned in our Democracy Project classes and they see voting as an essential first step. Now they want to talk directly with their Members of Congress.

Our efforts alone did not change the 2018 election, but they surely played a part. And in the end, it was worth it. Out of 100 new members elected to Congress this year, 40 are women and 25 are people of color. Including the first two Latinas to ever represent Texas in Congress. While the strength of our vote can change America, it, by itself, is not enough.

We have to do more. We have to run for office and be elected at the local, state, and federal level. We have to be at the table where policy and decisions are made.

Here too, our UnidosUS programs have contributed.

I am proud to have with us tonight a young woman who for many years participated in our youth programs and was a member of our *Líderes* Summit. Each year, the *Líderes* Summit brings together hundreds of young people from high school and college to participate in our national

conference. Alexis Hermosillo said of her experience in our *Líderes* program, “I was able to fully understand the importance of upholding my personal civic duty and what it means to have the courage to step up for others.”

This past year, Alexis was elected as Mayor of her city: El Mirage, Arizona. At 28 years old, she is the youngest Latina ever elected as mayor of that city. Alexis, I am proud to have the opportunity tonight to introduce you to our audience as, “Mayor Hermosillo.”

People like Alexis, Jose, Elisa, and Meri give us hope for the future; I've seen the passion in their eyes and the conviction in their hearts. We *need* that passion. We need that conviction because the election in 2020 represents a huge crossroad for our community.

One path takes us forward to the nation that our founders promised, an America of equality and inalienable rights; the other path takes us back to a time when a person's value was based on the color of their skin, the accent in their voice, the faith they practiced or by the people they love.

We have come too far to go back.

Recently, the *New York Times* told the story of Clemente, a Guatemalan man who fled his homeland after gangs murdered his cousin and stabbed his father.

Fearing that his daughter Wendy would soon be abducted, Clemente and Wendy fled across Mexico, waded the Rio Grande River and requested asylum from the first Border Patrol officers they saw.

Clemente and his daughter were soon separated.

He was put into a “*hielera*” or “ice box” where he caught pneumonia and had to be evacuated to a hospital. Wendy ended up in a children's center where Clemente is allowed to call her once a week, but she is not allowed to return to his care.

Their status remains in limbo.

I tell you this story because we need to remind ourselves, and the country, that our political battles are about people—men, women, and children—husbands and fathers, mothers and daughters.

They are not statistics; they are human beings.

We have to be their voice. We have to be their champion. We have to tell our community's story to counter the false one being shared by this president. It is up to us to take up the challenge.

If we want to stop ICE from breaking up our families and save the DREAMers and TPS holders, we must continue to lead.

If we want to be counted in the Census, have better access to health care, and help Puerto Rico rebuild, we must continue to lead.

If we want our students to complete college, to be tech-ready for the future, if we want our community to have a shot at the American Dream, we must continue to lead.

And that is what I hope to leave you with tonight.

Let's make this very clear.

We will not be broken.

We will never give up on our ideals, values, and hopes for this country.

We are not throwing away our shot!

The choices we make over the next two years, the work we undertake, and the passion and conviction we bring, will determine which road we travel.

Let's get back to work.

Let us rise up together—*unidos con animo y determinacion*—to define that road and create the path forward for the generations to come.

Muchisimas gracias.