



**Remarks of Janet Murguía, President and CEO, NCLR
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I'm not going to lie; it has been a disturbing year for the Latino community and our country. Over the past 12 months, candidates for the highest office in the land have redefined the political landscape into something unrecognizable. They have traded hope for despair, values for expediency, and dignity for bullying and bravado.

It began with Donald Trump's attack on the character of millions in our community, most of whom are hardworking, church-going members of our families. Declaring the border under siege, he demonized them as "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists" and proposed building a wall along the entire length of our southern border. Given the threat he conjured up, he might as well have painted a target on our backs.

I wish I could say that he was alone in this. I wish I could say he was an aberration. But he is not. In a race to the extreme, others followed suit and supported the round-up and mass deportation of millions, regardless of the devastating consequences to the children and families involved. It has not been a profile in courage.

Now, as the head of a nonpartisan organization, I cannot and will not tell anyone how to vote. But as the head of a civil rights organization, I can and will denounce nativism. I can and will denounce demagoguery. I can and will denounce proposals that fly in the face of American values. Xenophobia, race-baiting and religious bigotry are a staggering departure

from the values and principles upon which our nation was founded.

Mr. Trump, prejudice is not leadership; it is ignorance. Scapegoating is not strength; it is cowardice. And hate will not make America great again.

Such rhetoric undermines who we are as a country and the example we set for the rest of the world. To our community, we must not stand idly by while others define us. We must define ourselves. We will not be demonized. We will not be a punching bag. And we must use the power of our voice and vote to punch back.

Some politicians like to say that America has lost its way, that its greatness is a thing of the past. I can assure you, the American Dream has never been more alive. Just ask the millions of people in our community who believe in the promise of America with all their hearts because they have experienced it firsthand.

I want to tell you about one of those people. Her name is Bernardette Pinetta and she is a young woman from California who is in her third year at UCLA. I met her last month when we were introducing our new voter registration app, Latinos Vote, with our partner, mitú. It will give those who are eligible to vote the ability to register right on their phone. It is a powerful new tool that will help connect Hispanic millennials—and virtually anyone else with access to mobile devices—to the power of their vote.

Bernardette, like many in our community, is shy and soft-spoken. When she stood up to talk about the importance of her vote, she recalled her first experience with voting. As a little girl she went with her mom to vote. After her mother voted, Bernardette asked her for the little sticker that says “I Voted.” Her mother said, “you can’t have one until you vote.”

After telling this story, it became clear that, standing at that microphone, Bernardette was afraid and outside her comfort zone. At one point she choked up and had to stop to compose herself. She was so nervous and it took her a while. We all sat listening in that anxious space when you’re not sure whether the speaker will recover.

When she spoke again, her voice was very soft and filled with emotion. She described her vote as a symbol of her power, and spoke of the responsibility that power requires—a responsibility for her, her family, and her community to be informed, not just about the candidates seeking election, but about their policies and platforms as well. She said her vote must also speak for those who have no voice.

Bernardette had to stop two or three times to get through her speech. But through that struggle, we could see in her the strength and conviction to be heard. She found her courage, and her words touched everyone in that room. She said only with our vote will change be made. Only with our vote will the needs of our community be met. Only with our vote will politicians recognize our role in this country and will our voice be heard. She said, “If we don’t go out to vote, they will not hear us.” Although she spoke softly, her words could not have conveyed more power. Her commitment, her passion, her bravery took her out of her comfort zone into a place where she could make a

difference. She is an ordinary young woman making an extraordinary difference at an important time.

The most effective way to defend our vision of America is to counter hate with courage and action. In this election, we must all be like Bernardette. We must leave our comfort zones to ensure that our voices are heard. We must find our courage. We have already demonstrated that the road to the White House runs right through the Latino community. Our voice is stronger than it’s ever been and it will only become stronger.

But we must recognize that this is no ordinary election and that extraordinary effort is required to ensure that changes will be made. We can’t be satisfied with just voting ourselves. We have to urge our families, our neighbors, our neighbors’ families, our friends, our friends’ families, our *compadres*, our *comadres*. All of them! All of us!

We need to make sure those who can become citizens, do become citizens. That those who can register, do register. And those who can vote, do vote. We have the power to decide who we are as a country and what we stand for. Our destiny is in our hands!

Now is the time to step up.

Now is the time to step up—step up for ourselves, for our neighbor, for our community, and our country.