



**Remarks of Janet Murguía, President and CEO, NCLR
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This year began with the convening of a new Congress. Republicans had campaigned for, and won, a majority in both houses and promised to take the country in a new direction. Their leadership vowed a more productive approach to governing that wouldn't scare the American people by shutting down the government.

Except, apparently, when it comes to the Latino community.

It took just eight days for the majority of Republicans in the newly convened House to threaten homeland security funding by voting to block the president's executive order on immigration.

To make sure their intentions were clear, they also voted to repeal the highly successful program that provides temporary status to the children and young people known as "DREAMers."

And it wasn't just Republicans in Congress who led the charge. Republican governors and attorneys general led a coalition of 26 states to file suit against the president's executive action. They shopped for and found a sympathetic judge who ignored years of legal precedent to halt the executive order.

If I was being charitable, I might chalk these measures up as a political poke in President Obama's eye.

But, to be honest, this doesn't feel like just that.

This feels like it is about us—that when it comes to Hispanics and their families, too many in the Republican Party simply don't care. They don't care about the human toll their inaction has on our community. They don't care how many of our children will lose a parent. They don't care about the financial devastation they cause to our families and our communities.

I suspected as much last year when Speaker Boehner turned his back on bipartisan immigration reform. His refusal to allow a vote on a bill that had already passed the Senate—and had the votes to pass in the House—was a clear sign that there is no real solution that their party is willing to support.

Think about this week's standoff in Congress, which thankfully ended this afternoon. What kind of statement does it make that pro-defense House Republicans would put our national security at risk rather than allow any amount of relief on immigration?

To Speaker Boehner I have this to say:

You avoided catastrophe today, but we've been at this for over a decade. You keep saying “no.” Any attempt to resolve our broken immigration system is always “dead on arrival.” No matter how much the American public supports a solution, the answer is always “no.” Even when the votes in Congress are there for passage, you block it.

Where is your solution? Where is your bill?

You talk about family values, but when it comes to our families, you sit idly by and watch as hundreds of thousands of mothers and fathers are taken from their children.

You talk about rewarding work but stand by as our families are thrown into poverty by the sudden and permanent loss of a breadwinner.

What kind of solution is that? What kind of life does that leave for those children—those American children—now that you’ve left them virtually orphaned? How does that improve our communities, our schools, our safety?

Many in the immigrant community have been here so long that they have put down roots in our cities and towns. They’ve married into our families and are now the parents of our grandchildren. To us, they are family. Our family. Our American family. They are us.

Maybe you don’t see it. Maybe you believe the trumped-up extremist rhetoric that paints all undocumented immigrants as criminals, or even terrorists.

But, if you could see them through our eyes, you would know that the vast majority are hardworking mothers and fathers, neighbors and friends. They are the people who work beside us, who care for our children, and sit next to us in church on Sundays.

Every time you say no to reform it bears a real cost, a human cost, to countless families and their children.

Yet I hear no word of understanding about their suffering. I hear not a syllable of remorse. I see no sense of urgency to address this issue.

Instead, you chose to hide behind words like “sequestration,” “overreach,” and “filibuster.” Those words may have some value as a fig leaf inside the beltway. But what they say to the millions of people who are waiting for a solution is that our families don’t matter. You may think you were just stalling legislation, but for those people living in fear, you have kept their lives—and our community—in limbo.

President Obama stepped into the vacuum you left last year and issued an executive order on immigration.

When his action is upheld by a higher court—and it will be upheld—the steps he took will go a long way to end the nightmare that many face every day.

Families will stay together. Parents will continue to work and provide for their children. Communities and businesses will stop being turned upside down.

And millions will no longer live in fear, but will have the chance to get right with the law.

How can that not be good for America?

Regardless of what the courts do, the president's order will still have a significant impact. U.S. immigration enforcement will now focus on actual threats to our security. As the president said, our priorities will be "felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids."

That, in and of itself, is a tremendous leap forward.

He deserves an enormous amount of credit for acting boldly and responsibly. And for that we say, thank you, Mr. President.

As a nonpartisan organization, we lay out a table of bipartisanship every year at this dinner, in the belief that compromise can be made and members of both parties can feel welcome working with our community.

NCLR has received the support of many Republicans over the years including on our Board of Directors, our Corporate Board of Advisors, and among our Affiliates. We have worked in collaboration with many leaders, including the late Honorable Jack Kemp, Senators John McCain and Mel Martinez, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and our guest tonight, Representative Mario Diaz-Balart.

They fought beside us to expand economic opportunity, champion human dignity, and help us pursue the American Dream. And we are grateful for their support.

And we have the support of most Republicans in this country. Fifty-one percent of Republican voters in a recent poll support a path to citizenship.

But, there is a malignancy in the Republican Party, and it is growing.

There was a time when the extreme views surrounding the immigration debate came only from the party's extremists. Today, the extreme has become the Republican Party mainstream, and their rhetoric falls too readily from the lips of candidates at the national, state, and local levels.

That such rhetoric can have an impact should not be surprising. The political self-assessment published by the Republican Party after the last presidential election was unusually blunt.

As former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey said in this report, "We've chased the Hispanic voter out of his natural home."

They should have listened to their own words.

The Republican Party's blockade of any type of progress on immigration—whether in a bipartisan bill or the president's executive order—sends a brutal message to our community.

Make no mistake. Our complaint is not partisan. It's personal. The Republican blockade against reform is having a searing impact on our community.

And these actions will have political consequences. Candidates are already testing the waters for the next presidential campaign. Soon they will be asking for our vote—and with good reason. The Latino vote is the fastest-growing voting bloc in the country. Some 14 million Latinos will vote in 2016.

We have already demonstrated that we can shake up the road to the White House. Next year we will also be looking at how our vote can impact Senate races in states like Illinois, Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Missouri.

Candidates in those states and across the country have a choice. They can continue to follow the strategy that Pete Wilson used in California to marginalize our community—with predictable results—or they can step up to help us change the course of history.

One out of every four children born in this country is Latino. And every year for the next 20 years, nearly a million Hispanics will turn 18 and be eligible to vote.

You don't need me to do the math.

How our community is valued today—by this Congress—matters. Absent a significant change, the Republican Party stands to lose the Latino vote for a generation.

It is in our nation's interest that we find a way forward. The president's executive action is a temporary fix to a complex problem. Even when his order is implemented, there will still be some five million people living outside the rule of law. Only Congress can craft a permanent solution.

Fortunately, the framework for a bipartisan bill exists. A majority of Americans from both parties support its passage. And I believe that if we can work together, we can find a way to move forward.

In America, every person's dignity should be valued. Every child should come home from school knowing their parents will be there. Every worker should be able to earn a wage that supports their family. And every one of us should be able to pursue the American Dream.

But to succeed, we need a Republican Party that understands the human cost of saying "no." We need a Republican Party that sees beyond short-term politics to collaborate on a long-term solution. We need a Republican Party that can see our community the way we see it—as an integral part of this country and a critical part of its future.