

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### 2021 UNIDOS US CAPITAL AWARDS | MARCH 23

Good evening. This past year has been a difficult time for all Americans. But I am very proud that, in the hour of our nation's greatest need, our community rose to champion a better America.

We turned out in record numbers to make our vote a deciding factor in the presidential election. Years of work, including registering and mobilizing voters with UnidosUS Affiliates, led to sixteen-million Hispanics turning out to the polls, making us the second largest voting group in the nation. And with seven out of ten Latinos voting for President Biden, the Hispanic vote was decisive – particularly in swing states like Arizona, Nevada, and Pennsylvania.

Our vote gives power to our voice and already we have seen its effect. President Biden has begun his administration by naming four Hispanics to his Cabinet; no president in the history of our country has ever done that. Having people in these roles who understand our community will directly impact the way our government responds to our needs.

A number of measures we advocated for were included in the American Rescue Plan Act just signed into law by President Biden. These measures specifically address the most vulnerable members of our community including: an expansion of the Child Tax Credit to ten million Latino children and stimulus payments for mixed-status families that previously had been excluded from the CARES Act.

Representation Matters.

And it is my hope that this marks a new beginning for our community. After the last four years, we still have much to do whether it's expanding access to health care, improving education, increasing home ownership, or protecting voting rights.

As I look back on this past year and the challenges we faced, I am particularly struck by our response to the pandemic. In one of the nation's darkest hours, our community was a beacon of light.

The toll that COVID-19 has taken on our community has been devastating. More than any other segment of society, Hispanics and people of color have been hit the hardest.

And there is a reason for that...

While most Americans sheltered safely in place, we stepped into the breach to keep the American economy going. A full 70% of Latinos in the workforce are considered essential

workers. So, chances are, when people went out onto their balconies to applaud those who put their lives on the line – they were thanking us.

We were not alone. Many stepped up to the plate. But we, as a community, pulled more than our weight on the frontlines as doctors and nurses and healthcare workers. Our first responders helped keep our communities safe. And our factory workers, grocery workers, agricultural workers and delivery people, helped put food on the tables of American households and kept their pantries filled.

When other plants shut down due to contagion, the government ordered the chicken processing and meat-packing plants to reopen – despite the danger to their workers. Many Hispanics risked their lives – and died returning to work to ensure that Americans could eat. And, at the time, I might add...no one asked about their immigration status.

After the past year, it's time for America to rethink its relationship with our community – including those of us who are undocumented. We have been the backbone of a workforce that has kept America going so others could stay home, safe from infection. We certainly shouldn't have to be looking over our shoulders out of concern for the immigration status of a family member.

How much more do we have to do, to prove ourselves? Latinos and immigrants are vital to the nation's future. Over the next ten years, we'll be needed to shoulder more of the country's economic burden – not less. Not just some of us...all of us. We should be viewed and treated like what we are – *essential*.

Now, I know, that in our current political climate, the line between people who are here “legally” and those who are not is an easy sound-byte – it's an easy excuse that politicians use to dismiss the contributions, the value, and the humanity of 11 million people.

But to us? To our community? There is no line. Most of the 11 million have lived here for decades, put down roots, and married into our families. There is no distinction between them and us. They *are* us. We are indivisible. We celebrate the marriages, the births, the life milestones of our siblings and our grandchildren – We celebrate them together as familia, as a community.

As we rebuild from this pandemic, we need a solution. We need to see our immigration laws reformed so that these essential workers – including Dreamers, farmworkers and TPS holders – all have a path to citizenship. We've earned it. It the moral thing to do. It is the humane thing to do. And it's the smart thing to do.

Today, one out of five Americans is Hispanic, and under the age of 18? It's one in four. We are the future of America. We are vital to its success. If anything, America should be investing more – not less – in us.

If the pandemic proved one thing, it is that we are all in this together. We need to turn the page on our differences and unite and move our country forward. Too many lives have been destroyed, too many homes have been lost, too many jobs have been terminated, and too many futures imperiled. It will take a substantial effort by all of us to restore and rebuild our country. It will not happen overnight – and it cannot happen until we can all move forward together as a nation that recognizes the dignity and humanity within each of us.

*Muchisimas gracias.*