



Remarks by NCLR President and CEO Janet Murguía
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Los Angeles, California

(Thank Yous)

It is an honor to be with all of you today.

It has been a wonderful few days here in Los Angeles.

I'm grateful for the chance to talk with you about the important challenges Latinos face.

And it is quite fitting that we have gathered in Los Angeles.

As America follows the immigration debate, we are reminded of all the struggles and all the triumphs that were launched in the City of Angels, and throughout California.

Our history in this city, and this state, remind everyone of our proud and enduring legacy.

Latinos have been a presence since the earliest days of this city and make up the majority of its newest residents.

We have been here for a long time, and we belong here.

Anyone who has any doubt about that should have seen the line of people right here at the convention center this past Saturday.

They came by the hundreds to apply for citizenship. Some arrived at *four in the morning*.

That's dedication, and it gives us real hope.

PAUSE

And then there is the dedication of Latinos in our military. We were reminded of *their* heroic contributions last month in Iraq, when a young American serviceman, Kristian Menchaca, was tortured and murdered by terrorists.

He was a brave American, giving his life for his country.

Kristian, the son of Mexican immigrants, is one of thousands of Latinos who have made the ultimate sacrifice for America.

We've been doing it for more than 200 years.

PAUSE

This is a community that is willing to work and willing to sacrifice.

We want to belong, we know we belong, and we are working for the day when the rest of America knows it too.

At NCLR, and throughout the Latino community, our mission must be to advance together.

OUR MISSION MUST BE NOTHING LESS THAN OPENING THE DOOR TO THE AMERICAN DREAM TO *EVERYONE* IN THIS GREAT COUNTRY.

PAUSE

It is a lofty mission.

It is a mission worthy of our *sacrifices*, our *sweat*, and our children's *futures*.

It unites us, and
it inspires us.

PAUSE

Our community made this mission come alive in 2006.

We took to the streets, and we took to the halls of power.

Right here, right now, we can turn to each other and say, “We made *history* this year.”

MY FRIENDS, YOU HAVE CHANGED AMERICA.

And the best part is ...

WE HAVE ONLY JUST BEGUN!

We have only begun to mobilize our community, to strengthen our leadership, and to lift America up to its *full* promise.

PAUSE

Immigration reform is a start.

It captures the hope of everyone who has sought something better.

I am proud that NCLR is leading the way.

We want answers.

We want solutions that are best for our community, and even better for America.

We’ve got a job to do, and we will *get it done*.

We must help clear a path to citizenship and bring dignity to 11 million immigrants and their families.

We must make sure future immigration is fair and protects America’s borders and security.

We must bring balance, justice, and *closure* to an issue that has distracted America for too long.

PAUSE

But immigration is more than a problem to be solved.

It is the springboard to the next shining chapter of America’s promise.

This year, we *changed history*.

We took to the streets and said,
“Look at us. Listen to us.”

And America did.

We took to the corridors of power and the court of public opinion.

And our friends and neighbors said,
“Let’s do this together.”
“Vamos a trabajar juntos”

PAUSE

These experiences represent a powerful transformation.

Because of this debate, the Latino community is now seen as a *leader*.

We used to struggle just to get in the door, much less get heard.

Well, now we are *asked* our opinion – and then asked to lead the charge.

And not just on immigration.

On everything from culture to healthcare to the workplace to home ownership,
Latinos are setting the course.

Look at the ALMA Awards.

This spring, our country saw a fantastic array of talent that sounded and looked like
the America we actually live in.

We proudly showcased Latino entertainers and their contributions to America’s
vibrancy.

Look at health care.

As you heard earlier,

Wal-Mart agreed to an ambitious partnership with NCLR to wipe out Spina Bifida in the Latino population.

WIPE IT OUT.

For those of you who might not know, Spina Bifida is a birth defect that disproportionately affects Latino children.

Through our initiative, Wal-Mart has insisted that the largest provider of masa and tortillas for their stores enrich their product with folic acid, which helps prevent Spina Bifida.

Sound complicated?

I'll make it simple.

PAUSE

We're going to prevent 300 children a year from being born with Spina Bifida.

That's the kind of impact we can and want to have.

Look at the workplace.

Throughout America, Latinos are taking the lead in forging better job conditions for millions of workers.

Unions organizing, worker centers, minimum wage campaigns, immigrant protections – Latinos are increasingly asked to represent workers, not just in our community, but everywhere families deserve a better life.

Look at housing.

Every 18 months, NCLR Affiliates put *three thousand* families in their first homes.

The pride and security of home ownership are the essence of the American Dream.

Entertainers, union organizers, bankers, corporate executives; this is a diverse group. The message of this diversity is simple:

NCLR will partner with *anyone* as long as they help advance the interests of our community, and our country.

PAUSE

Our eyes are on the future.

We have big challenges, and even bigger plans.

PAUSE

I think that's why the anti-immigrant voices are afraid.

They see that the world is passing them by.

PAUSE

They are afraid. That's why they attack immigrants.

And because it's an election year, they are taking their fear out on our country.

Well, I'm here to tell you it won't work.

THEY ARE FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE AGAINST AMERICA'S GREATEST VALUES – LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

Their strategy of fear will fail in *Congress*, on *election* day, and for the *rest of time*.

The anti-immigrant demagogues are on the wrong side of history, and the wrong side of America.

PAUSE

The future.

That's what is really at stake here, and where our eyes are firmly focused.

The issue of immigration is critical, to be sure, but the significance of this debate is the direction it sets for what comes next.

That direction is *forward, outward, and upward*.

What we have done proves to our community that *we* control our destiny.

And it proves to the world that we *are* the American future.

PAUSE

That future is as bright as our resolve.

It's as strong as our determination.

The energy in our community is so powerful you can almost *see* it.

PAUSE

Now we must use it for one single mission:

opening the door to the American Dream to *everyone* in this wonderful country.

We have opportunities to seize, and challenges to tackle in order to open that door.

We have children to educate and families to house.

We have health insurance to provide and jobs to create.

We have civil rights to enforce and human rights to protect.

But to be successful we must harness the energy that is inspiring our community.

We must merge it with the *greatest force for good in the history of the world*:

American democracy.

PAUSE

Our democracy is where energy gets turned into action – and results.

It's where good ideas become higher wages, better health care, and stronger schools.

Democracy gives every American an equal chance, but to reach our dreams, we have to make better use of it.

We must make democracy work for *us*.

Today, we must launch a campaign to grow the power of the Latino voice.

This campaign will have four major components.

PAUSE

First, we must mobilize young people throughout our communities.

Their courage and patriotism during the immigration debate has been powerful.

Our job now is to help them sustain and grow this spirit, and move it from the schools and streets to the ballot boxes and legislatures.

PAUSE

Second, we must make a concerted effort to naturalize the many Latinos who are eligible.

They came here hungry for America's promise and deserve the chance to experience it as more than just a job.

We made an amazing start at this Conference but there is *much more to do*.

PAUSE

Third, we must commit ourselves to a *massive* voter registration program.

Latinos cannot afford to silence *themselves* by ignoring one of the few demands democracy makes of us.

If you are not registered to vote, *do it now*.

Take care of business.

PAUSE

For those of us who are registered,
our job is to get
family members and fellow citizens to sign up.

Voter registration is *everyone's* business.

I want you to say,
“Are you registered to vote?” as often as you say
“Good morning.”

PAUSE

Fourth, we have to vote.

Sounds easy, and you've heard it a million times.

But on election day, if you're late to work, or your teenager is sick, or it's raining,
you might think:

“Well, how much does one vote *really* count?”

PAUSE

It counts a lot – for *you*.

For you, as an *American*,
a *citizen*, a *patriot*.

Please vote, and make it count for the rest of us.

PAUSE

If we do these four things – *mobilize, naturalize, register, and vote* – we will
complete what I call the cycle of citizenship.

We will have fulfilled our duties and furthered our mission.

And we will *keep* opening more and more doors for all Latinos and all Americans.

PAUSE

Democracy works one person at a time.

It works through the courage of Kristian Menchaca, who gave his life for us in Iraq.

It also works through the courage of a young woman named Monserrat, whose story I would like to share with you.

Monserrat is a high school student, living here in Los Angeles.

Nine years ago, her father was deported to Mexico.

Those memories were painfully fresh for her this spring when she heard about congressional proposals to criminalize hard-working people in this country.

She thought about her father, and the hundreds of thousands of other families who might face the horrible fate her family went through.

PAUSE

She was scared.

But she was not timid.

Like tens of thousands of other high school students, she took to the streets and *took a risk for dignity*.

She did it for her parents and for *millions* of Latinos families.

PAUSE

This spring, our children helped change the world.

PAUSE

They did it for *us*.

They stood up in the sunlight of democracy, and said, “My parents are *good people*. They work hard and they deserve respect.

You’re not going to call *my* parents criminals.

My country is better than that.”

PAUSE

It was as powerful and transformative a moment as any in American history.

IMAGES OF YOUNG LATINOS TAKING RISKS FOR LIBERTY AND LOVE
WILL HELP DEFINE OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER FOR *CENTURIES*.

PAUSE

So when we are tired or struggling, let's remember
what our children did for us and how our community came together at this moment
in history.

WE *LIVED* DEMOCRACY, WE *LIVED* OUR VALUES, AND OUR *COUNTRY*
WILL ONLY BE BETTER FOR IT.

Thank you.