



**Remarks by Janet Murguía
University of Saint Mary
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Thank you for that very kind introduction. It is always a pleasure to be back home in Kansas and an honor to be before an institution I admire so much, the University of Saint Mary. I hope you all had a wonderful Easter.

Tonight I will be talking to you about the complicated and often contentious issue of immigration. But that's just a small part of what my organization does. Our focus is on the 46 million Latinos who live in the United States and who make up an ever-increasing share of the U.S. population. 15% of Americans are Latino but even more astonishing Latinos make up one of every four children under the age of 5.

NCLR's central mission is to expand opportunities for families in this country, especially Latino families, in areas such as housing, education, wealth-building, and health.

Last year we celebrated our 40th anniversary. For forty years, our institution has played a significant role in strengthening America by promoting the advancement of Latino families.

- Our NCLR Homeownership network has helped more than 25,000 low-income American families purchase their first homes and has provided counseling to more than 145,000 families.
- NCLR and our Affiliates have built a network of health clinics and lay health-educators that in 2006 alone, provided care and disease prevention to nearly 100,000 people.
- In education, we have long championed making early childhood education more accessible to Hispanic children. Our charter schools also provide quality education to more than 25,000 Latino children a year.
- And during our forty years, NCLR and our affiliates have helped millions of Hispanic immigrants fully integrate into American society, by providing English-language training, civics classes and assistance with naturalization and voter registration.

In short, we help to open the door to the American Dream to everyone in this country. The American Dream is not an abstract concept to me, it is real, tangible, and something I have experienced firsthand.

My parents, Alfredo and Amalia, came to this country more than 50 years ago with little money and barely a grade school education.

But they worked hard and believed deeply in the promise of this country, especially, for me and my six brothers and sisters. The values they instilled in us – family, faith, community, hard work, love of country, and sacrifice – have been my guide.

And thanks to those values, that character and that spirit, today I have a brother and a sister who are the first brother and sister in U.S. history to be serving on the federal bench together, another brother who graduated from Harvard Law School, and I am very proud that my father and mother were able to visit me when I worked in the West Wing of the White House.

But I worry that what has been my experience is not accessible to all Latinos. I am deeply concerned that we will be unable to open that door to the American Dream as widely as we need to and have the measurable impact on the lives of millions of Hispanic families as we should.

That is because one of our issues dominates – and affects -- all others, immigration. The vast majority of media coverage about our community dwells on immigration. Political pundits view the Latino vote almost exclusively through the prism of immigration. And virtually any piece of legislation or policy-making that touches the Latino community is subject to immigration-related scrutiny.

I believe the reason for this is the failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform. In other words, the failure to fix an immigration system that is profoundly broken.

What we have had in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform is a crazy quilt of patchwork efforts at the state and local level that have both done nothing to solve the problem and have made things worst.

At the federal level, the focus for the last decade or so has been exclusively on enforcement. For ten years we have poured billions of dollars into an enforcement-only strategy while simultaneously cutting off virtually any avenue for people to enter the country legally. The result has been nearly 12 million people who live in the shadows, outside the rule of law, and are subject to almost constant harassment and exploitation.

In the last couple of years, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has embarked on an ill-conceived, ridiculously expensive, and poorly executed strategy of high-profile raids throughout the country.

These raids have had devastating consequences not only to the immigrants caught up in them but on the communities where they take place. Raids have ripple effects that have not been taken into consideration by DHS. I don't have to tell you that when workplaces are disrupted or shut down, the burden of dealing with the fallout is not on DHS but on local government agencies and nonprofit community organizations. And these are the organizations most likely to already be underfunded or stretched to capacity.

Last year NCLR published a report with the Urban Institute on the effects of raids on children. The report found that for every two people deported, one child is left behind. Almost 600,000 people have been deported in the last two years which means that nearly 300,000 children, virtually all of them native-born American citizens, have had a parent deported in just 24 months.

And there are both immediate and long-term effects of this on children. We have heard gruesome stories of nursing infants being separated from their mothers by armed immigration officers and children left abandoned while their parents are in jail. But the long-term consequences – educational, economic, and psychological -- are just as troubling.

And the only real results of this strategy have been ripping families apart. In terms of stemming immigration, they have failed. In terms of going after unscrupulous employers who abuse workers, those bad actors overwhelmingly got a free pass. And in terms of improving our safety, we diverted resources from pursuing violent criminals to instead pick up dishwashers and seamstresses.

These reasons make it clear that, in the absence of comprehensive reform, this policy has to be re-visited and a moratorium should be placed on future raids.

The lack of comprehensive federal action has also spurred state and local governments to get into the act. There have been a number of punitive measures enacted over the last several years but one area of concern is the growing number of localities which have entered into what are called "287g" agreements with DHS to have state and local police enforce immigration laws.

NCLR believes that immigration laws need to be and should be enforced. But they need to be enforced by properly trained personnel in a just, effective way that does not undermine public safety and public trust.

What we have seen with these agreements is just the opposite. State and local police aren't getting the right training and as a result, they are often stopping, questioning and even detaining people who look or sound Latino.

This was confirmed in a recent Pew Hispanic Center poll where half of all Hispanics feared being questioned, detained, arrested, or harassed because of their perceived immigration status.

Even non-Latinos are affected by these agreements. When police are viewed with fear and mistrust, it undermines the public safety of everyone. Witnesses won't come forward, victims don't report crimes, and the primary job of these officers – stopping crime – is compromised.

One clear example of this is Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Arizona. Arpaio calls himself "America's toughest sheriff" and has self-promoted his way into a ton of publicity for his stunt attacks on undocumented immigrants in his jurisdiction.

Only problem is that his department isn't doing its actual job. Just three months ago, a respected conservative think tank, the Goldwater Institute, issued a report that stated that "Judged by its own statistics, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office appears to be falling seriously short of fulfilling its core law enforcement duties."

Federal efforts like the raids and local officials like Arpaio have gotten a lot of attention but they have failed at the most basic level – doing anything about the problem of immigration.

Ineffectual publicity stunts, haphazard immigration efforts, and lack of a comprehensive solution have only deepened people's frustration about our broken immigration system. And it has allowed the most extreme voices to dominate the immigration debate.

Voices better left on the fringe of political discourse have moved front and center to define the debate.

Their harsh rhetoric has filled the immigration debate with code words that demonize and dehumanize - not just immigrants - but Latinos as a threat to the American way of life. They depict us as "an army of invaders." They call us "a swarm" and "a massive horde." They say that we bring disease and crime to our country.

What's worse is that they have had a helping hand from the media. A recent NCLR analysis shows that spokespeople from hate groups and vigilantes - such as FAIR and the Minutemen - have appeared at least 120 times on cable network news programming over the last three years (not counting print, local television, or radio). Rarely is their background explored or challenged. Rarely do they appear with an opposing point of view. And, if that wasn't damning enough, many of the media's talk show hosts and commentators parrot their hate speech on air.

NCLR has tried to draw back the curtain to expose those hate groups and extremists with the launch of our campaign and website, "WeCanStoptheHate.org." We have challenged the cable television networks for putting hate groups and vigilantes on the air as immigration "experts." This initiative relies on the strengths of our organization: our advocacy and communications, tied with the mobilization of our Affiliate network.

We are using this campaign to educate the public about hate groups, hate speech and its consequences - because we know that words have consequences...and hateful words have hateful consequences.

It is no surprise that hate crimes against Latinos are up 35 percent over four years. Hate groups targeting Latinos are up 48 percent since the year 2000. Two-thirds of Latinos say that the failure of the immigration bill has made life more difficult for Latinos overall and roughly half say that it has affected them personally.

Even at NCLR we have not been immune to this atmosphere of hate. A young man in North Carolina was convicted late last year of sending us threatening emails.

Separating families, harassing people because of the way they look or sound, demonizing others, words and deeds of hate – these things are inconsistent with the values we hold as people of faith and as Americans.

One of the greatest parables in the Bible is the story of the Good Samaritan – the “alien” who was the only one to stop to help a Jewish man who had been beaten and robbed on the road from Jerusalem. This parable is among the most famous of all the stories in the Bible because it speaks to the values of kindness, mercy, decency, and a common humanity.

What we need is a solution that reflects those values and the values we hold dear as Americans – fairness, justice, and getting things done – and that helps America live up to its best values, not its worst instincts.

And that solution has to be practical – we cannot – in reality and in good conscience – expel 12 million hard-working people from this land.

The solution we advocate is one that restores the rule of law that unites families, that treats all workers fairly, and that puts people in the system and on the road to earn citizenship.

This is comprehensive immigration reform in a nutshell. Comprehensive reform will allow us to control our borders, bring 12 million workers out of the shadows, and restore order, fairness, and balance to our immigration system.

And it will help all workers in this country by lifting wages, increasing tax revenues, and creating a level playing field for workers and employers.

We understand that a strong economic recovery is built on a platform of shared prosperity, and immigration reform is part and parcel of that approach. When you have a system in which 1 in 20 workers is susceptible to exploitation, it affects working conditions for everyone. When you have a system where bad employers abuse workers and avoid taxes, it undermines us all (the Congressional Budget Office has

estimated that previous reform proposals that would get people in the system would have generated new revenue at the tune of \$48 billion to \$66 billion dollars).

And that is why we also need to make sure that we have a verification system that helps crack down on these unscrupulous employers but we need to make sure that it is a sound system. Because the only thing worse than no verification system is a flawed one.

And reform will do one more thing – it will allow us to get this issue off the table so that we can all concentrate on the issues that affect Latinos and all Americans most – education, the economy, and health care.

Late last week, the Obama Administration – citing widespread support for a solution to the immigration – said it was embarking on a reform strategy. This is very good news not just for the Latino community but for all Americans.

Next week the President will be making his first visit to Mexico and we applaud any effort to will bring renewed attention to this neglected part of the world. Our future is inextricably linked with that of the other nations of the Western Hemisphere. Engaging Mexico in our efforts to fix immigration is not only a good thing to do but essential.

We intend to work with the White House and Congress to make comprehensive immigration reform a reality as soon as possible. And we hope you will join us to once and for all make sure that the shrill voices of a can't do minority do not prevent our country from getting the reform it needs.

Thank you.