

# **Unidos US Annual Conference**

Thank you. I am grateful for this opportunity to speak about the values you care about.....empowering and advocating for the American dream and equal opportunity for all Americans. Latinos are a voice that needs to be heard loud and clear in our communities, in our states and in Washington DC.

I believe in the American story. The American story begins with those immigrants who risk everything to come to America seeking freedom, pursuing opportunity and a better life for their family.

The American story is about the young man whose dad had a limited education and worked long hours in a poultry plant to provide for his family. That same young man became a Congressman and then Governor of Arkansas. Yes, that is my American story.

I grew up on a farm in rural Arkansas and because of access to education and God's providence I had the privilege to serve our

nation in time of crisis. After 9-11 I was asked by the President to set up the new Department of Homeland Security. This put me in the White House Situation Room in the White House working with President Bush to fight terrorism. And now to serve as Governor of Arkansas for the last 8 years... where we have kept our businesses and schools open through the pandemic; where we have led the nation in computer science education; and where we have lowered taxes and created the largest surplus in Arkansas history.

But today we have Americans who are struggling because of high gas prices; food costs and inflation across the board. That is why we are meeting in special session next Month to put more money into the pocket books of those in need.

The American story is also about my daughter in law who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and today serves her community helping immigrants with legal issues.

The American story is about every person in this room who takes responsibility; works hard; dreams big and believes that America can overcome its challenges and continue to be the beacon of freedom for the world.

The American story starts with opportunity. In Arkansas we have nearly 5,000 DACA recipients. These are those who have a legal presence in the United States as a result of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. These recipients who are primarily students and recent graduates have been limited in opportunity because of a lack of access to professional licenses. We fixed that last year and passed Act 746 which allows DACA recipients and other immigrants with work permits to obtain professional or occupational license in the state. (Pause)

This is an important step to remove roadblocks to those wishing to write the next chapter in their American story. Now they can be teachers or nurses or whatever they chose to be in life.

But we do have some challenges ahead. First, people are dying trying to come into this country. We have to fix a broken immigration system. Last week I learned about Juan Domitilo from the small town of Wickes, Arkansas who died in the tractor trailer rig in Texas along with over 50 other migrants. He was trying to get back to his family who had been in America for over 20 years. This heartbreaking story tells us we must do something different.

I hold the cartels responsible for the death and violence along the border. We need to end the cartels control of our border. We must stop the senseless killing and human trafficking by the cartels who want to destroy the American story.

We can do better. We must do better for the Cities of Laredo and Nuevo-Laredo; for Del Rio and Piedras Negras; Brownsville and Matamoros; El Paso and Juarez. These magnificent gateway border cities want the Governments of the United States and Mexico and other Central American countries to work together to

return human dignity; the rule of law; and commerce to these border communities that too often look like they are in the middle of a cross fire.

But there is more we need to do. We need to have a legal immigration system that works. We must have a legal immigration system that is enforceable and at the same time meets the needs of our workforce.

Now, let me address the growing problem of violence in our communities. Our founding fathers knew that freedom would lead to anarchy if we did not have the undergirding of the rule of law. In other words, the state has a preeminent responsibility to keep our communities safe, to support the rule of law and to punish wrongdoers. That is why we have awarded a \$5,000 bonus in Arkansas to each certified law enforcement officer. It is our way of saying “thanks” and your work is important.

Our founding fathers also recognized that a democracy could not survive without individuals who were self-governed by their

own conscience. It is a matter of each individual restraining evil and following a moral compass that is rooted in virtue. A conscience that is reaffirmed in the home, places of worship and community. Today, we see both a weakening of the rule of law and a society losing its individual virtue. So, the answer to our challenge of violence in America is to support the rule of law and to recognize the importance of faith, virtue, family and community.

That is one reason the Latino community is so important to America. It is because you value individual responsibility, the role of faith and the importance of family. And that is why it is so important to have a public school system that does not undermine what is taught in the home and in our churches and synagogues.

Parents want a quality education for their children. And that includes computer science education that results in good paying jobs and will keep America leading in the world.

In Arkansas, we went from 1,100 students taking computer science to over 12,500. And 12% of the students taking it are Latino.

And when it comes to higher education we must make it more affordable. As parents and grandparents we want our young people to be able to afford college without going into debt that will strangle their opportunities to live out the American story. I went to law school on a student loan. I paid it back but it is much more difficult in today's world.

There is no reason for the federal government to charge high interest rates for student loans. The loans need to be paid and I don't advocate for across-the-board forgiveness but we can provide help by **permanently lowering the interest rates.**

Let me end by saying Latinos are essential to the fabric of this great country. And any political party which wishes to win had better pay listen to you and learn from your experience.

The next chapter of the American story must be written based upon optimism, hope and confidence in our future. We need problem solving leadership. We need leaders who work on problem solving and not on how to get even or fight the last battle. Together, we can overcome the obstacles and we can write a new chapter about how Americans have renewed our spirit and brought people together to make America Strong and Free for the next generation.

Thank you.