

**CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE**

**"TAKE BACK AMERICA"**

**SPEAKER:**

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ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA: Let me thank Bob Borosage for that generous introduction, and thank you all for the generosity of your applause. I come today as someone who believes that this is a great and beautiful country. I was asked earlier today what was the significance of my victory and I said, we live in a country where we had a civil rights act and a voting rights act that opened up the country to someone like me. We live in a country where people fought to ensure that America was all that it held itself out to be. And in many ways that's what our charge is here as we talk about taking back and reclaiming America.

I come today as a patriot, knowing that there are few places in the world where the son of an immigrant, a young boy who grew up in a home of alcoholism and domestic violence, a high-school dropout, could go on to become speaker of the California state assembly, or now on the threshold of being the mayor of the city of America's hope and its promise. (Applause.)

I talk about patriotism because I think for too long progressives have allowed some to wrap themselves around the flag and say, America, love it or leave it. I say, America, I love you but I want you to be all that you held yourself out to be. (Applause.) I look at the city of Los Angeles. Make no mistake; it's an incredible place. Wherever I went I said, I'm running for mayor because I believe in you. I believe in your destiny. I believe that this city is the city of America's hope. It's the place where we come from every corner of the earth to live out the American dream. It's a place where we come from every part of the United States. I used to joke that you could grow up in a trailer park in Topeka, Kansas, go to a talent agency, work in the mailroom and one day run it. Now, that's the kind of place that Los Angeles is.

It's a place with some 30 different nationalities – 30 different nationalities who have their largest population in that city outside of their country of origin. But it's also a place we speak 120-odd languages and many times don't speak to one another. Why is that important to us? Because take a snapshot of Los Angeles and in 25 or 30 years so will go Topeka, Kansas and Des Moines, Iowa.

When you look at the challenges that we face in our city, the challenges of bringing people together, the challenges of finding common ground, that's the challenge of all of us. When you look at America and its changing demographics, our ability to embrace those new Americans, our ability to bring in the waves of new Americans who have come to this country to live out the dream is essential if we're going to truly represent every part of this great country.

I was a big part of this last campaign, the national co-chair for the Kerry campaign. I went all around the country talking about the need for America to be all that it's held itself out to be. And I can tell you that I come today to suggest to you that it's

not just a litany of issues. Yes, I do believe that healthcare is a right, not a privilege – (applause) – that a country as rich and powerful as America, every child and every human being should have healthcare. I do believe that in a country as prosperous as this great country, that we should be addressing the issue of poverty and homelessness in a way that frankly neither party has done a good enough job in. (Applause.) I do believe that in a country with an over-reliance on fossil fuels, one of the most important things we could do for our children is give them a cleaner environment and move toward alternative energy sources. (Applause.) I do believe that civil rights is still an important issue that should be on all of our agendas, even though – (applause) – America had made many strides over the last 40 years.

But I think we need to look long and hard within our movement, within ourselves. You look at this room today and you don't see the kind of diversity that we need to build a strong movement in America. (Applause.) We're not reaching out enough. When I ran for mayor four years ago I talked about the need for us to talk to one another. I talked about leadership that would unite us, that would bring us together, and many almost laughed at the idea, scoffed at the idea. In fact, even some of the people on my own team thought, well, you know, Antonio, people don't want to come together. And four years later, when people asked why they supported my candidacy, they said, I think they'll bring us together. I think he has the ability to connect us, to help us realize our common destiny is the city.

We need that kind of leadership in America right now. It's not just about a litany of issues, everyone. I'm 52 years old. I'm a grandfather. I started out in the civil rights movement. I've been involved my entire life. America wants you not just to talk to her brain and her mind; America wants you to talk to her heart as well. The idea – (applause) – the idea that an agenda can just be an agenda of a litany of issues is an idea that is bankrupt for so many people and our families. We've got to talk about what real people care about as well. We've got to redefine family values to include more than just some people's views of the issue of choice or gay marriage. We've got to say, for instance, that it's a family value that when we see a child in poverty, that we want to lift that child up. (Applause.)

We should be saying as part of our agenda that it's not good enough to walk over the homeless. We should pick them up and give them housing and the skills and the hope that they need to reclaim their lives. Those are the values. (Applause.) We should be saying that a value of peace and harmony in the world is a value that every human being should be able to embrace – (applause) – that every human being should be able to take as their own. We should be saying to America, yes, this is a great country. I do believe in you, but I want to work hard to make your dream a reality for more people. That's the values that I think that most Americans care about and those are the values that we're going to have to communicate: the value of the idea that we should be judged by the content of our character not the color of our skin – (applause) – the value that understands that the measure of a great society is not what we do for the rich and powerful because every society in the history of the world has done great by the rich and the powerful. It's what we do for the children, what we do for those who don't have a voice. (Applause.)

I'm unabashedly a progressive – (applause) – but I'm not a knee-jerk either. And I say that because sometimes we fail to understand: you take people where they are and you try to move them to your direction. You don't go so far out in front of people that they don't feel that you're connected with them. We've got to understand that part of building a movement to reclaim America is to understand the strategy and tactics of where we need to be today so that we can be somewhere else tomorrow. We've got to identify the issues that we can create a common ground all across the country. I've said that neither party, in my opinion, is talking about an urban agenda; neither party is talking about revitalizing cities. (Applause.) We don't see a commitment to economic development in communities that have been left behind that are so critical to raising up the standard of living and addressing the divide between rich and poor.

In Los Angeles I've said a great city is a city where we're growing and prospering together. That idea resonated in the San Fernando Valley as much as it did in South Los Angeles. It wasn't an idea that was threatening to people, because as they thought about it they realized if we're not doing something about the fact that so many of our kids are dropping out in Los Angeles, where the majority – 60 percent of Latinos are dropping out, 50 percent of African-Americans – if we're not doing something about those kids, all of us will be impacted. They won't be able to support our Social Security system. They won't be able to pay into that system so that we can keep it solvent. We'll have more kids in prison instead of moving on to institutions of higher learning. We've got to get beyond the rhetoric and focus on the common ground and focus on the things that people care about.

And so I've come today as someone who's been involved since I was 15 years old. I'm 52 now, so that's a few decades. I can tell you in that time that I've had an opportunity to work in the many movements that all of you represent. I know that if we're going to be successful, we can't just talk at people; we have to listen too. (Applause.) I know that when we come to a conference like this and we rejoice in the harmony of our agenda and look around and don't see the changing face of America, we have to be concerned. We have to say hold it – (applause) – what do we need to do? What do we need to do to bring more people in? Politics, when deduced to its simplest component, is about addition and multiplication, not division and subtraction. Our ability to build and multiply, to bring in a broader group of America is the great challenge. It is not whether or not we're for this issue of that; it's whether or not we can build an agenda that a broader group of people can get around, build, and bring people in, create the foundation to move people up. I would submit to you that those are the questions that we have to ask ourselves in these times.

If there was something a kernel – a kernel of what we could use from the victory, I'd say to people it wasn't a Latino victory, it wasn't about Latino power; it was about building a coalition. It was about saying to Los Angeles, judge me for who I am, for what I have done, for what I want to do. Judge me because I believe in you, I believe in your future, I believe in your destiny and I know that together we can take on any issue.

I believe that we need to articulate that kind of vision for America, and that might mean that in the next few years – we might not accomplish all of the things that we want to accomplish in the next decade, but we are strategic and we're building, and we're developing the trust and the support that is so important to win as well, because the one thing that you realize over time – I'm not 15 years old; I'm not a 19-year-old kid on the college campus – it is also about building and winning as well. It is also about reinforcing those victories with the hope that comes – yes – si, se puede; we can do it; we can build; we can create a broader agenda for America.

So I wanted to come primarily to thank many of you – some of you from Los Angeles and some of you from around the country that supported my candidacy. Some said that I have been the most progressive speaker in California history – (cheers, applause) – and that may be true – and that may be true, but I'm also known as the most bipartisan speaker in a generation. I worked with the other side; I realized they got elected too and that I had to work with them. I realized that they represented a big part of what California was about as well. I would submit to you that that could be a blueprint for what we have to do around the country as well.

And so I thank you. I'm honored to be here. I look forward to working with you as we debate America's future, as we work together to build a broader movement for the idea that America is a great place, but it has got to be a greater place for more people if we can truly realize the dream. Thank you so much.

(Cheers, applause.)

(End of remarks.)