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### Panel Discussion: “Unleashing the Giant: Voter Registration & Civic Engagement”

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## LEAD Original Programming

### **Panel Discussion: “Unleashing the Giant: Voter Registration & Civic Engagement” (2019)**

*START – 00:00:00*

>> Bienvenidos and welcome to the next installment of LEAD Media programming from Studio 54, Campus of California State University-San Bernardino, the digital media platform for inspired educators, leaders, and community activists, and advocates taking our message directly to the people to the gente. Thank you for sharing our common interests in the analysis, discussion, critique, dissemination and commitment to the educational issues that impact Latinos. I'm your host, Dr. Enrico Murillo, Jr. and this episode is a syndicated replay from Season 10 of LEAD Summit 2019. The theme that year was *su voto es su vos*, everyone counts, and this panel is entitled, Unleashing the Giant, Voter Registration and Civic Engagement. We can only edge closer to the representation of our community when we use our vote as our voice so our presence can not only be felt in the electorate, but public policies can better resemble and reflect the needs of our community. As educators, advocates, and leaders, we must all work together to engage the next wave of voters, Latinos or otherwise, so as to build a civic society and representative democracy, inclusive of all of our interests. The panelists discuss efforts to promote the broader movement for social and economic justice through increased civic participation, working with community-based educational, religious, labor, and other organizations seeking to build civically cognizant and active neighborhoods. Continue and enjoy the full value and complexity of this episode. We extend our appreciation to our LEAD sponsors and partners, planners, volunteers, speakers and panelists, production team, affiliates and town hall chapters and commend them all for lifting their voice and uplifting the plight of Latinos in education. Thank you, gracias, vasa cama te. So our next panel will be introduced by Cecile. We call her Cecilia -- Cecile Dahlquist. Cecile is a Board Certified family nurse practitioner in the Student Health Center, Palm Desert campus, and is a doctoral candidate, cohort 11 in the Educational Leadership Program here at Cal State University- San Bernardino. All yours, Cecile.

>> Thank you very much. It is not time to go to sleep yet. It's the last session of the morning, but last does not mean least because this panel is going to be talking about unleashing the giant, how we do that. How are we going to unleash the giant? Voter registration and civic engagement, and it's a panel discussion, so you get to interact. Now is the time for Latinos to unleash the giant, energized and empowered and reflective of the growing diversity in the United States. It must begin with exercising the right to vote. We can only edge closer to true representation of our community when we use our vote as our voice, so our presence can not only be felt in the electorate, but public policies can better resemble and reflect the needs of our community. As

educators, advocates and leaders, we must all work together to engage the next wave of voters, Latinos or otherwise -- I'm the otherwise -- so as to build a civic society and representative democracy inclusive of all of our interests. The panelists today will discuss efforts to promote the broader movement for social and economic justice through increased civic participation, working with community-based educational, religious, labor, and other organizations seeking to build civically cognizant and active neighborhoods. Among the topics are increasing voter registration. How do we do that? How do we awaken the sleeping giant? The need for practical and targeted voter education, critical engagement and participation -- participation rates and organizing and exposing Latino youth and community members to social change opportunities and long-lasting community power, so don't go to sleep yet. Lunch is coming. So, on our panel, we have three people today. I'm pleased to introduce to Janet Bernabe, who is the Riverside Regional Coordinator for Mi Familia Vota. We have Luz Gallegos, who is the community directions director commun -- I'm sorry, Community Programs Director for TODEC legal center, and we have Francisco Sola, who is the Chair of the Latino Voter Registration Project. I'm going to turn it over to them and they will each tell you a little bit more about themselves.

>> Okay, so thank you, thank you. So yes, as mentioned, my name is Janet Bernabe. I'm the Regional Coordinator for Mi Familia Vota. I oversee -- currently oversee the Inland Empire, so Riverside, San Bernardino County, and if needed, I'm in L.A. in Orange County, which that -- it's a lot of ways to go, but yes, we have several programs that we work with right now, one or more successful programs, and we have our youth and leadership program with students and naturally, our students will -- they're volunteering outside our table. We do promote civic engagement, so civic engagement could go from voter registration, voter education, citizenship workshops, citizens -- DACA workshop, and also citizenship classes. We do partner up with other organizations. I truly do believe that doing something, collective work, it makes MFV more possible and to get a bigger turnaround, especially to get the Latino community involved, and I'll pass it on to Luz.

>> Hello. Luz Gallegos from TODEC. A little bit of history because I think it's important to give you all some context to where we were at in the Inland Empire many years ago. Our -- TODEC was founded in the city of Paris in 1984, by our founders Luz Maria and Antonio Ayala that are here, and they -- when -- they actually migrated from the state of Michoacan, Mexico. Over 40 years ago, they migrated to -- viva Michoacan. So when they first came to East L.A., they were already organizers back in their state, and they re incorporated with nuestro companero, Bert Corona and Cesar Chavez, so they were part of that mover. They were part of organizers, so when they moved out to the I.E., they start -- we had a -- I don't know how many of you all have been here in the I.E., but we had -- we lost a lot of our fields, especially in Riverside County. We -- there was a lot of farmworkers and a lot of injustices, not only dealing with labor, but also with immigration, so that's when our organization was founded in 1984. At that time, we were mobilizing to D.C. to get the amnestia passed, IRCA in 19 -- that passed in 1986, but that was a grassroots effort, and our organization was part of that effort mobilizing to D.C. to talk to the electives because we're talking about civic engagement, and it's very

important for our youth, and to know about the history, where we were at and where we are now. We are definitely in a better position in the Inland Empire. Then when we were able to advocate for the amnesty at the national level, along with the other organizations that were part of that movement, we passed amnesty. Right away, TODEC was founded in 1984. Since then, that's how we started with our legal services. We started helping all these legal permanent residents that were benefited from the amnesty to get their legal paperwork. Right away, we started with our education, teaching them English, and there was a lot of injustices in the I.E., but our founders were visionaries, and they were changemakers because they had a vision. They said, how are we going to make change in the Inland Empire if we don't have a political power? So they knew that their focus was civic engagement. They knew that these thousands of people that they helped get their legal status at one point, they were going to be able to be -- they were going to be eligible to become U.S. citizens, so we focused on community organizing. We focused on civic engagement and advocacy. Although we were advocating for so many injustices, we knew we couldn't create change if we didn't have the right representation, so I'm very happy and honored to tell you that TODEC has helped over 100,000 immigrants become U.S. citizens since 1984. That has translated to our change in our region. Right awa -- since then, the organization has grown. We were founded in the city of Paris. We've grown to be regional. We serve Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties. We have an office in Paris, our headquarters, an office in Coachella and another one in the high desert in Victorville, but we have workshops throughout the region, but not only our focus. We were focusing on creating change. We're advocating for better policies that really brought justice to our immigrant community, and as we continued with that, we saw -- we were turning out so many people becoming citizens, getting them out to vote, registering them to vote, but we weren't creating -- we weren't being impactful, so right then and then 2011 hits, and that's when redistricting happened. TODEC was part of that mobilization along here with en companero Francisco and a lot of other advocates to mobilize to the commission meetings. We were mobilizing our base because we had -- we're a base-building organization. We have over 80,000 members in the I.E., so we were all throughout the region where the commission meetings were going on. We were mobilizing people. We're elevating their voices. We came together with the companero to redistrict to make sure that the polit -- the maps that we were presenting were being approved because our votes were being -- they weren't having impact, so as we were coming together with -- going to the commission meetings, the very last commission meeting, I know Francisco remembers, here in the county of San Bernardino with the Board of Supes, as we were leaving, the Commissioner comes out and tells our -- Luz Maria Ayala, which our executive director, she said gracias por venid. Ya se van -- she didn't know he was a Commissioner because they were up in the platform, and he's all yeah vamonos van ellos salo vaces no senora. Yo soy el comisionador. I'm the Commissioner, and we've seen your organization every single meeting, and because of the -- of you elevating the voices of our community, we're going to respect the maps that you guys are supporting. Bam, right away, 2012 hits we start seeking representation at all levels of government, and the elections now, we have representation that really reflects our Inland Empire. We see -- we have Dr. Ruiz in Coachella. We have representations at all levels of government, but that took community effort, and we're

very proud of our citizens. You saw them earlier. We -- I want to recognize them, some of them that are here today and our youth, because we're building continuity to our work, because we have a leadership pipeline. I came from the leadership pipeline. A lot of our staff, a lot of our youth here, because we need to continue building continuity to the work, and I could say that the Inland Empire has leveraged the power in the state of California since then, because of all these efforts and not only of our organization, but a lot of other companeros in the state. Entonces con esto -- I want to share a little. We were going through a lot of changes with the political environment right now, but what one thing we could say is that we are united and I.E. is in a better position.

>> Muchas gracias. Mi nombre Francisco Zola and I am volunteer with the Latino Voter Project. We started this project at the era of 187, 27 years ago or so, hosting a project in the city of Riverside for the southwest voter registration, so it's an honor to be here with Miss Camarillo and Miss Gonzales, because that where we got the start, and the project was so successful, that we decided to create a permanent group and we've been working since up to today. One of the challenges that we have, as still remain is local city council, as has been mentioned, and school board, and county supervisor, and that was the focus of our group. We have a lot of barriers that still exist that is hindering the election of Latinos to these type of areas, and I hope we can in the question section, we can address more of that, so as we continue developing a tradition of voting in the Latino community, I'm happy what we doing with the other state level and in Congress level. Can you imagine that there are only seven Republicans in Congress in California? Well, you know, they're working very hard to lose our votes, so one of the things that, you know, we have conquered that kind of representation on the State Congress level, we have to continue pressing in the local election. This is our next challenge. I hope we can talk about in the next part. Thank you.

>> So at this time, we have our esteemed panel up here and we can open up the conversation for anybody who has questions.

>> Everyone.

>> I guess I [inaudible].

>> Okay, all righty. Hello, everybody. Mi nombre es Alexa Victoriano. I am a non-traditional student, also a puentista from East Los Angeles College. I also was a former student trustee for the largest community college district in the nation, the Los Angeles Community College District, so my question is that I've heard a lot of great amazing things from you, saying that you guys are all mobilizing large numbers was absolutely great, but what I'd like to know is that how will your organization and not only engage but mobilize college students given that 72% out of the 1.3 million Latinx students are enrolled in community colleges? So how will you engage and mobilize us college students to ensure that not only we register to vote, because it's easy to register folks, but how do we mobilize them to ensure they get to the poll?

>> Francisco, would you like to take that one?

>> As you heard the -- our distinguished Secretary of State, we have made a lot of progress in voter registration. For many years, our challenge was, you know, we can get the out the vote but we have so many people having [inaudible] so the focus was in voter registration. Actually, we're changing the name of our organization from voter registration to voter mobilization because of that. We are a group of volunteers, so our approach is different, because of the limited resources that we have, and we use the concept of captive audience. You are my captive audience now, so you have to listen to me, so we try to go to places where we're able to get a lot of Latinos, and that will say fiestas and we go to the high schools. We try to do the voter registration and the mobilization drive at the graduation assembly or being at the school setting. You know, the religious organizations have very good because you go to mass and there's like 500 to 1,000 people in that mass. The other concept that we try to push is a lot of people tell you, well, you can put up a table outside or you know, we always try to have somebody from the organization that give our message, promote the message, and then when people get out, or we could do the voter registration, people are aware as different than when you're outside that you're sitting down at a table, so that's what we do with community college. We try to engage with the student body with the puente project, because it's always good to have somebody from the organization but it's also addressing the voter registration part.

>> I would like to add, loca esta a ganas mas que nada we are here to help all of us here and to engage with you all but it also takes from you, from the youth to step up and get involved with these organizations. I know we have a you within our program, one of our programs that deals with leadership engagement is our [inaudible] that we're part of the procession, but we have several leadership programs that [foreign language]. You know, you guys also need to step up. It's -- because as it is, we are in limited resources in the Inland Empire. We are constantly overshadowed by different -- by L.A. and San Diego, but we do need to come together, together as a community. As you work to come together, together as a community, as you were -- as we came together in so many different spaces. It came to mind a song that we were mobilizing. It came to mind when Alex Padi -- the Secretary was talking about Prop 187, we came together across the state because estaba we had a governor that was very, very anti-immigrant, and I remember we all came together throughout the state. People that wouldn't even step up. We have to go across the line with our Asian-Americans, our African-Americans, and we put together a song and I want to sing it to you all because it goes along with what the companera said.

[ Singing ]

So it's the same thing. We see history. Thank you. We see history repeat itself, especially with this new administration, but we all have to come together and we all have to step out of our comfort zones, and that's what we continue telling our youth we cannot stay silent, because staying silent is a sin. So I would add on to that really briefly. We do have really successful ways to mobilize our students. We currently do have our youth leadership and civic engagement program for our youth. We work with

different high schools in Riverside County. Now we're trying to see if we can move forward to San Bernardino County, and it's about educating our students, letting them know what -- yeah, not just to register to vote, but also what the importance is and what is at stake, so if you're not voting, you're letting someone else vote for you, and as I'm going to add on to Francisco's dialog as well. We do put ourselves in spaces where we can be directly in contact with college students. Myself as a student myself, I'm doing my master's in American Studies and I do know that you get, you know, sight tracked with school, whatever it might be, and sometimes students only have like, two minutes of your attention, so trying to bring that, you know, importance of what's going on and knowing that the, you know, the political climate that's going on right now, and how it's affecting our community as well, so just, you know, advocating for that and giving the tools to students to not just register, but to educate them as well.

>> Thank you. Do we have another question?

>> Yes. Hi, my name is Patricia Luna, and I wanted to make a comment or suggestion. I was part of the hoy marchamos manana votamos and then I remember when I was marching, I was marching with my kids. Now they're grownups, and then they vote when they -- it was time to do it, they did it, but one of the things that I noticed is that, I mean, it is good to inspire everybody to vote, but what are we doing on regards of educating or guiding people to vote strategically, estrategicamente? I mean, to be independent, because what we see now if we don't like it, we can vote the other way, you know? That's one of the things that worries and the other thing that I would like to suggest you guys, if you guys have a talk show, or something that guide weekly, at least, the community to know what the -- what strategically voting is physically means. I'm sorry, every time I speak in English, I get nervous and I get stuck, but I really -- I got inspired by a talk show is called Fernando Espuelas, Caf  Espuelas, and I learned a lot about voting, going out and voting, and if you cannot vote, inspire somebody, somebody else to vote, right? But I think it'll be nice if we can have that line as a guidance, at least weekly, and I think radio or on social media, something weekly that is reminding us to do it good, you know? Thank you.

>> Thank you, Patricia, for your question. I think I really liked your question. I could share a little bit of what we do. We hold voter workshops, voter educational workshops, where we just don't have them on election. We have them throughout the year. We're -- because as a nonpartisan organization for us -- it's for us, it's important not just to be -- make people citizens and register to vote and get them out to vote. They need to research. They need to learn how to research of candidates or propositions, because for us, we -- it's -- the research part is so important, and that's why I really enjoyed your question, because part of the thing is not just engaging them and empowering them with this power, but how are they going to use that power? So we do hold workshops for san -- voter workshops, or when there's elections coming up or propositions where we go over the ballot, and how are you going to research your candidate, right? Because now everybody wants the Latino vote, but what have they done for us? We can't just go off the parties because sometimes the parties could, you know, they might not be -- we have to go for -- as a -- when we're researching someone, we have to look at the

person, the background they have, what have they done for their community because, and that way, we could make the right decision, but at the same time, the voters, we as voters, we have a big power. Maybe they get elected one year, but if they don't come through with their promises, next time they're going to want to be elected, and that's when their -- our vote's really going to count, you know? That's when we're going to say well, you didn't do what you what -- your platform didn't align with mine, so ellos van a los tu vamos vera. So it's very important to be engaged and be educated, we do have those workshops. Please reach out to us. We'll be more than happy to start workshops in your community. Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> Our goal is to develop a tradition of voting in the Latino community. As I mentioned, in particular in the city, in the local elections, where we have a third and to that end, we can concentrate now more in education mobilization because of the progress we made in voter registration. So you know, you address different community with different needs. You know, one of the things that I -- we approach is when you go to a high school, you know, we can talk about marijuana legislation and everybody start paying attention, so those type of issues and you know, and educate people that, you know, the decision the elected officials make are affecting the us every day. Recently, I'm giving a very good example where we go through the community of the changes in our representation allow us to get the School of Medicine at UCR up and running. We're doing a Chicano Latino, Cheech Marin Museum in Riverside. That Chicano Latino Museum is as a cost of \$50 million on for donations and for state contributions, allocations. If you compare that with the different approach of different politicians that they're putting \$600 million in a jail in Indio, so those are instances and we can start. What are our priorities. So the opportunity of continuing and stressing the education part is very good and now that we get out the registration part out. Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> So on our end, we currently -- I work closely with other organizations. I've been working with the League of Women Voters in Riverside, and it's the way they actually do their layout of the propositions is very useful, so I've been using that guide also to be able to have our voter education sessions, and just using you know, collectively what we already have, instead of you know, reinventing the wheel, but also taking the knowledge that even for my father, he became a citizen about four years ago. Don't just look at the, you know, the candidate. If it's Latino name, it doesn't necessarily mean they're going for Latino issues, so that's one aspect that I really emphasize all the time, like, really get to know who the candidates are. Very important to get that, you know, ball rolling, such as right now there's a Riverside City Council election coming up in June. Attend the candidate forums. I know it's difficult for many of us to even attend, especially the times that they have these kind of forums, but that's why we guide our students, because I've noticed that our students are usually the ones that fill out, you know, the parents' applications, even the voter registration form, which my dad has asked me, but you know, I can't do that, but I do guide him and I tell him, you know, this



is what's going on, and you need to be informed. If you have any questions, I know everybody doesn't have the same guidance or a resource like myself, but it's just teaching one another that there are resources, and one of the things I love from the League of Women Voters, they have multiple languages, so not just necessarily in Spanish. So we tend to use that guide to help us out or do presentations as well.

>> Thank you.

>> Hello, my name's [inaudible] and I'm actually part of the puente statewide office, but I'm also a delegate, an appointed delegate for the 57th Assembly District. The California convention is coming up in May, and so I had one suggestion and then also question. My suggestion is in terms of organizing communities, you know, each one of the communities and respective Assembly district and Senate districts are taking delegates to California's Democratic Convention, so I suggest as organizing communities, that you meet with your delegates, and that you say what the priorities are for your community, so that that -- those voices can be delivered in at the state convention in May, one. Secondly, in terms of my question, I want to know, as organizing communities, how can we better strengthen the opportunity for our youth to interweave with cross-generation leadership development, so that our new up and coming leaders are structured into a way where we're developing? I know that you talked about your youth programs, but how can we do it more structurally so that we can do it across the board and not just with specific communities?

>> And I can actually answer that. So we do, like I mentioned, we have our youth program, but we also have a interncy program. Our interns, we're literally grooming them to be mentors for our youth, and then vice versa, when our youth go into, you know, higher education, they could also be mentors for the upcoming youth that are going to be taking part in our program. In addition to that, we've been finding ways to engage students and just you know, we do have really good also good relationships with already with elected officials, and for myself, I put myself in settings where I can take action in giving recommendation. I just recently got an e-mail indicating that I was going to be part of the Policy 47 Advisory Committee, so I'm going to be working closely with Eloise Reyes, and focusing on issues within her district, which I'm going to be the voice for those that, you know, are literally -- can't -- have a difficulty of attending any kind of meeting, so I take that in consideration to have students and myself be able to be in those kinds of settings as well, so just overall it's just mentoring and having that, the guidance where students can actually be leaders themselves.

>> Well, that's exactly the issue here because as we improve representation, we have access. We have access to talk to our legislature where in the past, you know, we didn't really had that influence. One of the things that is going out right now in the election for the City Council, if you have, you know, all the positions that is running is young individuals. The incumbents are usually older people, but because the election is set up for this next June, the turnout usually is very low, and the people who vote are the older people, so it's kind of a catch 22. How can you get representation for the youth if these barriers about election still remain?

>> Yes. Ditto to everything. Through our youth leadership program, it's actually a pipeline, so it's a three decades, so we see a lot of our youth development coming back to community mentoring. We're also part of different committees, with electeds. We sit on advisory committees for almost all our Congressmen and in our in our region. We're also part of the census committee that's here in our region, so we're trying to plug into anywhere, because it's very important for us to have those convers -- real conversations and be part of the table so we can continue elevating the grassroots issues, and thank you for your question. It is something that we've been working on and it's just so important. As a grassroots organization, we need to continue elevating the voices of the grassroots because that's where the needs are. That's where the needs come from, so especially with our youth, they have different needs than the adults so we have them to be part of our table. They're part of the organization board. They're part of our different committees that we have, so it's a way to continue building that leadership and leadership that's real leadership that comes from the grassroots that they know the suffering and they know that that's -- they're never going to -- that's ever going to go away what we're creating is community consciousness within our youth. That way they could come back as mentors and they could come back as professionals but never forget where they came from.

>> Thank you, Luz. I think our time is almost up. We have time for one more question.

>> Buenos dias.

>> Buenos dias.

>> Buenos dias.

[ Foreign Language ]

>> I speak English too but

[ Foreign Language ]

We have to it in spite of, so

[ Foreign Language ]

Don't feel alone. Whenever you're walking, just know this, that all of your ancestors that came before you walk with you and all of the progeny that have not been born yet also walk with you, so you are never alone. Gracias.

>> Gracias.

>> Gracias companero por sus palabras.

[ Foreign Language ]

We're passing state law that's really reflects on the needs of our vulnerable community, but that took decades to be done until we have this political force that are really people that are represented or reflective of our communities, so of course, our undocumented communities have to be part of the process, but there also have to be part of that table, because that's how we're elevating their voices. We just came back from Sacramento where we were mobilized for healthra [phonetic] for to expand medical coverage for undocumented communities just like the companero said, our people have worked here that they don't have a status or years and years and all their work, all their -- all the contributions to the economy, and they can't even have a medical coverage. They're -- a lot of our elders are dying, so we have to continue elevating the voices. We need to continue pushing policy that really protects and defends our vulnerable community, but that takes a village. That takes all our community and that's something that we have been doing within the organization.

[ Foreign Language ]

We have a saying in TODEC that was taught by us by our founders

[ Foreign Language ]

And that's why it's important for us to be part of the table for us to stay together to for us to be representing our communities, for us to educate our communities, not only providing them the services but engaging all levels of our community. Viva, la raza.

>> [multiple speakers] Viva!

*END – 00:38:33*