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Capstone Address: "Sin Fronteras - Educating Beyond Borders," Hon. Fabian Nuñez

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LEAD Original Programming

“Sin Fronteras - Educating Beyond Borders,” Hon. Fabian Nuñez (2017)

START – 00:00:00

[Music]

[Wolf Howling]

>> Bienvenidos and welcome to the next installment of Lead Media Programming from Studio 54, campus of California State University, San Bernadino, the digital media platform for inspired educators, leaders, and community activists and advocates, taking our message directly to the people, to the [foreign language]. Thank you for sharing our common interest in the analysis, discussion, critique, dissemination and commitment to the educational issues that impact Latinos. I'm your host, Doctor Enrique Murillo, Jr., and this episode is a syndicated replay from season eight of Lead Summit 2017. The theme that year was [foreign language], educating beyond borders, which meant we had committed to work together with those who share our common values and belief and the conviction of the transformative power of education. Our capstone speaker that year was the Honorable Fabian Nunez, who served as the 66th Speaker at the California State Assembly. Fabian and I go back about 35 years and he is widely recognized for his unique ability to lead and find bipartisan solutions to complex public policy challenges. Nunez was named legislator of the year in 2007 by Governing magazine. Continue and enjoy the full value and complexity of this episode. We extend our appreciation to all our Lead sponsors and partners, planners, volunteers, speakers, and panelists, production team, affiliates, and townhall chapters, and we commend them all for lifting their voice and uplifting the plight of Latinos in education. Thank you, gracias, [foreign language].

>> Ok, without much ado, I have the greatest honor this evening to introduce our capstone speaker for Lead summit 8. I know why, I know I'm a bit tired, you're probably a bit tired, but you will not be disappointed. The capstone rounds out the day and this speaker here exemplifies for us the tagline [foreign language], and Fabian will not disappoint. The Honorable Fabian Nunez is partner at Mercury and served as the 66th Speaker of the California State Assembly. Honestly, 65th or 66th?

>> 66th.

>> 66th, ok, I have to double check. Honestly I couldn't think of anyone else to reach out to for advice, for guidance, for the needed policy, understanding of what's going on, especially in the new political context in this federal administration. Fabian previously served as the Political Director for the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, and as the Government Affairs Director for the LA Unified School District. It was roughly 15

years ago when he first was elected to the California State Assembly to represent the 46th district, and within, within a year or half or two years was selected as Speaker of the California Assembly. He served three 2-year terms as a member before being term-limited in 2008. Nunez was named Public Official of the Year by Governing magazine for his legislative leadership and accomplishments. Now I've known Fabian for about 30 years, maybe more than 30 years. We work together, I, I think I, actually I think I was, I was, I don't know what the hierarchy was but I was chief, I was the Chief of Operations, so maybe supervisor, I don't know if it was. So I, I, I was his boss, I'll just say, I'll claim it. I'll say I was his boss. Anyways we worked at a place called One Stop Immigration and Educational Center during the IRCA Amnesty years, and anyways, without further ado, primo, ladies and gentlemen, the Honorable Fabian Nunez.

[Applause]

>> Thank you very much Enrique, or should I say Professor Murillo, for inviting me to be here with you today. Certainly I want to just say a couple of words if, if I may, regarding the last two panels which I sat here in the back and was very interested in the, in the conversation, first on the, the folks that were engaged and involved in Zoot Suit. What an incredible play, and someone said it, I think when they asked the question about whether the timing, whether it was timely and, and what connection it had to the present. And I remember whispering to somebody that it seems to me that in today's day and age, if you look at what happened during the Zoot Suit riots and what is happening today in America, it isn't as if, as one panelist said, history repeating itself. This is going back in time, because we do make progress over time, because history is not, doesn't move in a circular cycle. History is a spiral movement, and so this is not history repeating itself. This is people trying to go back to a day and age where folks that look like you and I didn't live here. And that reality that we confront today with the new administration occupying the highest office in our government, is more than troublesome. For many of us who believe in, in the dignity of what America stands for as a nation, you know, this is, this is a country where its identity has been reaffirmed by people three, four, five hundred years ago, and then transformed over time, but what it's become is an identity, is a country that really is based on ideas, the idea that we can all come here, that we can all prosper, a place that welcomes immigrants, a place where you can go and chase your dream, where anybody from any corner of the Earth can come here and realize a dream that they potentially could not realize in the country of their birth, and start a new life, and have generation after generation of family members stay in this country. That's what America is about. And so Zoot Suit, in my view, really is about the hope and promise of what this country really means, its real identity, and we are part of that identity, a very rich part of it. The last panel that just spoke, obviously you know, the, the assemblywoman and the senator, we should be so proud of them. And I, I didn't get all the questions but I do, did notice one of the young persons getting a little feisty. I noticed Armando Navarro, Doctor Navarro sitting here. You know, he, and we say young people are feisty. Armando says it doesn't speak to youth. Being rebellious is a beautiful thing. Having young people stand up and challenge those in power is good. It's the way it should be. I remember when I was Speaker of the Assembly, I had a number of students come to my office, and they were UCLA

students. And they came to my office and they said you know, we're really upset because we don't think you're doing anything to, to help us. And they said you know, we're trying to see what the state of California is going to do to make sure that we get help with our college tuition, and they made a number of, of, of points. And they said you know, we need to have, you know, we demand, and they gave me a list of demands. And I said ok, this is really nice to have a list of demands. I said, but when you have a demand, there's a consequence when somebody doesn't meet the demand. I said, so let me see what the demands are, so I saw the list, they wrote it there, you know a group of them, they huddled. And I looked at the demands, and one of the demands was that, that they needed to see Governor Schwarzenegger. So I looked, I read through the other ones but I noticed my assistant came and said listen, the governor's waiting for you, we're in the middle of the budget negotiations. So I said ok, I'll be, I'll be a little bit late. I may have a visitor or two with me. So I said ok, listen. I said listen. I like your demands, I like your demands, and I want to meet all of you, all of them. I don't know what the consequences are if I don't meet them, but as organizers you should always have a consequence. You know, I was an organizer, and if somebody didn't respond to what I wanted to do and I was protesting, I'm going to bring, and I would, I had 10 people, I'm going to come back with 20 people. And then if they don't respond with 20, I'm going to come back with 100 people. And then if that doesn't happen then we're going to try something else. But I said, as organizers always think about these, these things. And so I said ok, come on, and they were pretty feisty. I said, I want to take one of you down to a meeting to come meet the governor. So another one raised their hand and said listen, that's not your choice, that's our choice. We decide how many people get to go with you to the meeting with the governor. And I was like, [foreign language], you know? Not only are you going to, oh by the way they never had an appointment, they just showed up at my office. So I had meetings backed up, but it was fine. So I said ok. They said well we, you know, we will do this only if two of us go to the meeting. Ok, two of you come to the meeting. And then on the way out they decided that a third, a third person was going to join us. So I take them down to the governor's office. And the governor's there. I said governor, I want to introduce you to these young people, and I really think you should listen to what they have to say. And I think you need to listen beyond their words and look into their eyes. These young people are hungry for an education, they're hungry to contribute to our society, yet somehow they're in legal limbo because of their legal status. And they shouldn't be. And these kids are just as American as anybody that we can point to. And he said ok, what, talk to me. And then, and then they're like oh, oh, oh, oh. The one that was yelling at me in my office was like well. Oh, I gave this young man a look, and I gave him this look like, you better yell at him the way you were yelling at me. Because if you're going to raise your voice at me, you know, I know I'm Mexican, but this guy's got more power than I do. And I know you're doing it because you, you want to protest against power. And, I will tell you this. There's a lot that is happening around the world today, but who would have ever thought during the time Enrique that you and I, in our very, very early years in the, in the early 1990s when we were at One Stop Immigration Center teaching ESL classes to a population of workers, that taught us a lot. We learned more from them than they did from us. As we were teaching them how to learn the basic skills of English grammar, through their struggle we could see the fight that they were enduring.

You could see in their faces, you know you could see the struggle. In their eyes you could see the pain. You could see the sacrifice in, in the way they carried themselves. And we learned a lot about ourselves through that process, and the sacrifice that our own parents made in, in, in, in order to give us a better life. But it was very humbling, that experience back then. And I remember a couple of years before that, you know, at UC San Diego, I wrote in the student newspaper called [foreign language]. Before that it used to be called [foreign language]. And when I ran for office, I never thought this stuff would come back to haunt me. You know, I had eight arrests for civil disobedience. Most of them, and I say most, because one of them was something different, and I was very young, but most of those arrests had to do with protesting. One, I was protesting in favor of the hotel restaurant workers. Another one was protesting for the Service Employees International Union when the LAPD came down with batons and started beating us. And we had just opened that One Stop office in Pomona, and I had just met Doctor Armando Navarro. Maybe I was so inspired by a speech he had just given, I don't know, but I do remember leading a group of about 50 workers, and the police came at us with the batons, and I thought that it was a bit surreal. I said they're not going to hit us, so I walked in the middle of them, I said you can't do this. You've got to, and I started putting my finger, my hand like this, and I had a picket sign. Well the guy starts swinging his baton, so I naturally did what one does best, which is run and hide under a car. They pulled me out of the car, you know, beat me a little bit, put me in jail. They released us, hit us with misdemeanors, and then 10 years later we won a lawsuit against the LAPD, and it was about. Yeah.

[Applause]

>> It was about 20 of us that got beaten. By the time, we have meetings with the lawyer every so often, I remember the first meeting was like 10 of us. The last meeting, I went to it was like 2000 people in the room. I was like, how did you guys, [inaudible]. But, but the issue of [foreign language], the concept, which is interesting is that, here we are in the world that we are today. And you look at the ideology that is behind the man who is occupying the office of the President, which you know, his political strategists laid it out very clearly. It's an ideology of economic nationalism. What does that mean? Economic nationalism. Really what it means is having an economy in this country that ultimately walls itself off from the world for a number of reasons. And you hear the conversation regarding the corporatist capitalists, right. And you think wow, you know, I studied Marxism when I was in college, and I think well some of this may sound like, we're, we're against capitalism, right? I mean, I don't like to see the gap between the rich and the poor continue to widen the way it's widened and look at what's happening with globalization. You know, global markets that, where people seek, look for places to produce their goods at the cheapest possible rate so that they can turn around and sell it to the highest bidder. Right? And so you think, ok, well some of that may make sense. But if you look a little closer, what this is really about is against something that is, that globalization is doing, not as a direct cause of trade or how the capitalist markets are organized. But more importantly it is almost a side effect of globalization. And that is that globalization is forcing integration. Now we can disagree with the economic side of it, but there's something fundamental that is going on, and that is with the development

of technology and the fact that a device like this can now allow us to be in constant contact with any person anywhere in the universe, or that you can send a message or that you can start your own newsletter, or that you can start your own news agency if you wanted to do that. And you could mobilize people in Egypt or South America or Africa or anywhere in the world for that matter. So that the points at which people can communicate are now completely connected. And so communication is forcing us to have to look beyond what is happening in the four or five or six or ten or twenty walls inside our own home. And so what this administration is really against is that side effect. It's not that they're against wealthy people, because well, we have a president who claims to be a billionaire himself. He may have never paid taxes in his life, he may find ways to skirt the law here and there in a creative, quote unquote creative way, so that he doesn't have to pay taxes to fund our schools and our roads and education and everything else, but he somehow doesn't want the side effects of globalization to impact the U.S. That's why they want to cut off the trade deals, the trade deal with China, with, with, with Asia. That's why they're looking at doing the things that they're doing with NAFTA. And of course NAFTA goes deeper than that, but they're against trade, because what they're saying to Anglo workers in the Midwest who have lost their jobs to automation and who have lost their jobs to technological development, is they're saying to them look, these are the people that are taking your jobs. Your jobs are going because of this trade, because of these trade deals that we're making, and your jobs are going to Mexico, so now we're going to build a wall. And so they figure they're going to create more employment. But it is an economic philosophy that is based fundamentally on race. It's really about making sure that you push out people that don't think the way, maybe they think you should think, or that don't pray or worship in the same way they think, perhaps, you should worship. Thus the ban on Muslims. Or that perhaps have a different skin tone than the skin tone that they think you ought to have that qualifies you, in this country, in this day and age, as a quote unquote American. And so when you see on a daily basis, through your smartphones, and I see them all the time. The young girls who get into the train in New York, and the man who comes up to them and says why don't you guys go back to your country. Young girl sitting there saying, I'm from Puerto Rico. You know the, the, the, the, the, the, the kids that were going to the march in San Antonio, to the women's march, the day after the inauguration who were being harassed by an older white male who came up to them and said you should be ashamed of yourselves for being in this country. You don't belong here. Go back to Mexico. The young girl couldn't even speak Spanish. So what is really an American in the eyes of those who believe that the way that you're going to protect the world that we live in and the economy that is going to prosper in this country is by doing two things, is by having an economy that is self-sufficient and self-dependent, that doesn't have trade with anyone else except perhaps Russia maybe. Or, and at the same time figure out how to start pushing people out, little by little. Because I'm going to tell you something about this immigration issue. Do you think that this administration is going to spend the billions and billions of dollars that it's going to take to deport 11 million undocumented people? Absolutely not. You know how they're deporting us? Through fear. I see it. I have a lot of friends who are still undocumented, members of my, in my own family, members of my own family. And when you talk to them, they wear the fear. And every opportunity I get, I tell people don't be scared, because that's how

they win. Yeah, but you're not the one that's going to get deported. Well, the message isn't just to the undocumented. The message is to everybody. Because think of it this way. An undocumented father or mother of a legal citizen child, who are they deporting? They're not just deporting the father. Once the father leaves, and he's the main breadwinner, if he is, because oftentimes these days the mothers are the main breadwinners, and they're single and they come here and they're, and, and they're raising their kids here alone. But they get deported, the kids are going to have to. Oh, I'm sorry. The kids are going to have to follow. They're not going to stay here, and they're U.S. citizens. They're going to end up in Mexico or in South America or Central America or wherever it is that that person gets deported to. And then the message to people who are legal residents is oh, be careful because if you break the law, anything, could be a DUI. We pull you over, well maybe we'll start questioning you. That makes people uncomfortable. Like the young girls here in, in Orange County, went for a drink to a nice place, have some beers and some food, a Mexican restaurant, Solana Beach or something like that. I'm not sure where it was. It was in the LA times, huh? Huntington Beach. And they say hey, the, the, the waiter of all people. Now who on God's earth told the waiter that he had the right to enforce immigration laws? Oh I wish that waiter would ask me for my green card. My boxing skills would go back to work. And, and I could only imagine, you know just, it's just, how uncomfortable, how unpleasant that is to have somebody come up to you and say to you, show me your legal status. Young lady's a U.S. citizen, born in this country, sitting there with her mother or some friends. But this is happening every day somewhere in America. And part of the, part of the reasoning behind it and the strategy behind this, is to instill fear. And then from that fear ultimately start pushing people out. You know, former candidate for president on the Republican side four years ago, who was a former governor of, of, Mitt Romney. Well he's from Utah but he was, Massachusetts, he was governor of Massachusetts. Mitt Romney said, said I don't believe in mass deportations, I believe in self deportations. What Donald Trump is doing today is he's trying to push, yeah they're doing some deportations here, but this is about self-deportation. And also in the media, you know the media dramatizes things because that's how people live, they watch the news today at 6 o'clock, how, see how this person just got deported. Well if, if you're undocumented and you're watching it and then they're talking about it, it's scary. But we're not saying hey, calm down. We need to be calm about this. We need to be smart about this. We need to help one another. Because there's another side to this. I'll tell you what it is in California. The other side to this in California is that I saw a poll recently that shows the highest level of sensitivity by white folks towards Latinos than we have ever seen before in this state. And the same is true in states like New York, Florida, Nevada, and even states like Arizona, where we saw a lot of anti-immigrant hatred come out of Arizona over the last several years. And so a lot of things are happening. But there is a shift that we're beginning to see, and this shift is a shift that ultimately is a call, not a call to arms because it's not a revolution. But it's call to action. People need to get involved. And the involvement isn't simple the tweets and you know, sign up for this online or read this or watch this video. It really has to go beyond that. Because if you look at the power, and where it is, and I listened to some of the actors earlier talk about, well how do we change Hollywood? I want to say well, it's about economic power, because those that have the money get to decide who's in the movies. Simple as that.

But there's another form of power beyond economic, there's political power. And political power is much more achievable when people work together than economic power. Because economic power is hard to come by if you don't have the cash in your pocket. But we do know, and yeah collectively we had in our pocket as consumers, but that's a different conversation. But achieving real power is achieving political power. And political power is not that difficult to achieve. It's just, it's so easy to do that people don't do it. Because they think well, somebody would have already done it. Well people have done it, but not at the scale, at the level that we need to do it, which is, it's going to sound really boring, but it's making sure that we register to vote. It's making sure that we vote in every single election. We just had an election in LA County, and you know what turnout? 20%. 20% turnout. The second lowest voter turnout election in the last 72 years in Los Angeles County. 20%. The Latino portion of that vote, even lower. So when we talk about yeah, we got power, we got. We've really got to do some work. Because it's not enough to just say hey listen, come to this rally, or sign, sign this petition. But it's about organizing. It's getting people to vote. It's coming together. It's expressing our collective will through the exercise of the most democratic form of participation that exists in this country. Because a billionaire in California can vote. They got one vote. And we got one vote. And so that's where you can go toe to toe with the people that have the capacity, the economic wherewithal to do things that we potentially could not do otherwise. And as you look at the world today, and as you look at what's happening, you see more Latinos in office, yet you continue to see the gap between the rich and the poor. The concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. So the only solution is not electing people to office. You know, every once in a while we have a great leader that's willing to take risk and that does the things that they need to do, as we have here in the legislature. And I would say not just the two that were here. You know, the Speaker and the Pro Tem in California and the Governor. They're standing strong in defense of, of, of immigrants. But it's not enough to rely on somebody else to do it. We still have to get involved and we still have to exercise that collective will. Because when we do that, that's when people in Congress pay attention. Short of that, we get involved, we jump up and down and we make a lot of noise. But that is where the source of the power really is, is at the ballot box. You know, Donald Trump would have lost the election had 200 organizers in Florida who decided to stay home, thought that the election was over, had gone out and did the canvassing that they were supposed to do in their local precincts. Not too far from Miami. They just decided that day, oh, it's over. They didn't go work. Something just as simple as that. 200 people, say hey, listen, let's work to the end. Let's work until victory is in our hands. And obviously I'm not, I'm a Democrat, I'm not a proponent or an opponent of any given political party, but I certainly am a progressive, and in my view, at the end of the day when it's all said and done, it comes down to one thing, and that is do we exercise our collective will through that which is the most important common denominator that we have in the American democratic form of government, and that's our right to vote. And it doesn't sound exciting, but we got to exercise it. Because if we don't, the result is what we have in the White House today. And let me stop by making one prediction before, before, before I leave. And that is that with all this, with all of this that is going on with respect to the election tampering with the Russians, and the campaign emails, not just for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but the Democratic party, and if you look at all of that, ultimately it's all going to

come, it's all going to be out in the, in the public eye for people to see. And people will get the facts. A lot of those facts are starting to percolate already, and it's pretty clear that there was collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians to disinform the public about many things, and to do things which were illegal. But there will be a percentage of the population in this country when presented with 100% of the evidence that will still not believe it, that will still say, oh that's just the press pushing on our guy Donald Trump because he's for us. You know, that's the subtext, because he's for us. That's not me talking, that's his people. And if you look at this polls, his approval ratings, his approval ratings are what? 38, 39%? 37%? That 37% has been with him since day 1, when David Duke and everybody else jumped onboard and said we support your campaign. And that 37% is never going to change because they finally have somebody in the White House who's openly supportive of them. They use different language now of course, not the same language, but it's the same thing, it's the same old, same old. And so my prediction is it's going to come out, he'll still have the support of those people, but at some point in time after the Republicans lose some midterm elections, in a year and a half from now, they will start proceedings to start looking into impeachment and the Republicans will not be able to sit there and allow this to continue to happen, because it is the disintegration of the American political system happening right before our eyes. At some point they're going to have to put their foot down and say ok, enough is enough. Let's move forward. Thank you very much. Have a good night, and I wish you well.

[Applause]

END – 00:34:49