



Congressman Rubén Hinojosa
Texas State University
Certified Public Manager (CPM) Graduation
Texas Capitol, Austin, TX
Friday, December 14, 2015
2:00 pm (10-15 min)

Good Afternoon. It is an honor for me to be in the presence of faculty members, guests, parents, students, family members, and of course, our esteemed graduates for this momentous occasion.

First, I wish to thank Texas State University, Texas Tech, Stephen F. Austin State University, Sam Houston State University, The University of Houston, and The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley for offering this training which leads to earning the advanced college degree as Certified Public Manager. I am pleased that these institutions have made a steadfast commitment to educating the next generation of public servants.

I also wish to recognize Dr. Howard Balanoff, *Director and Professor* of the William P. Hobby Center for Public Service, for his extraordinary dedication to public service in Texas and for inviting me to speak today.

Finally, I would like to congratulate our outstanding graduates for committing themselves to a career in public service. Today, we bestow upon you the badge of a “Certified Public Manager” in recognition of your hard work, dedication and accomplishments. Let’s give our graduates a round of applause!

As you embark on a new chapter in your public service careers, I must underscore Pope Francis’s message before the United States Congress. In his recent address to representatives and senators from both chambers, Pope Francis urged our nation to be more caring and compassionate – a message promoting the common good among all of its citizens. Importantly, Pope Francis highlighted the challenges of

the poor, of immigrants and refugees, and those truly disadvantaged as a result of income inequality.

By highlighting the leadership roles and political activism of President Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton in American history, Pope Francis encouraged our nation to adopt public policies that do more to address social challenges like poverty, income inequality, immigration and racial discrimination in our society.

The Pope's message is particularly relevant to individuals like you who are entering the field of public service. While you may come from diverse backgrounds and faiths, you have all decided to serve the public honorably and honestly. As I reflect on the Pope's powerful message, I ask you to think about what you can do to help address the social problems/challenges like poverty, income inequality, immigration and racial discrimination that continue to persist among many in our society. When you are called upon to assume influential leadership roles in society, I ask that you remember the children and families in our communities who need our help and support to improve the quality of their lives.

As many of you know, for nearly twenty years, I have had the privilege of representing the 15th congressional district of Texas, a dynamic and unique district that stretches from Guadalupe County, southeast of San Antonio, all the way down to the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas along the border with Mexico.

Today, I wish to share some of my experiences as a public servant with you. To be sure, my passion for education stems from my mother's encouragement to study hard and stay in school. At an early age, my mother fostered and instilled a love for reading and writing in all of her eleven children.

As the son of Mexican immigrants and a first-generation college student, I believe that education is the key to success. Having been born in the small rural town of Edcouch in Deep South Texas, I did not know what was in store for me. Growing up, I never imagined that I would one day walk the halls of Congress as the representative for the 15th congressional district of Texas.

A college education opened the doors of opportunity for me and my family, and it has allowed me to have a successful career in public service. As a public servant, I have spent the better part of my civic and political life working to expand educational opportunity for all students but especially for disadvantaged children, youth, and adults.

I believe that every student in America should have access to a world class education. A good education continues to be the great equalizer in our society, a transformative *key* that has the power to unlock unlimited potential and opportunity in all who hold it.

In fact, many of our social ills can be tied to a lack of education and opportunity. Without basic knowledge, literacy skills, a high school diploma and a college degree, it is extremely difficult for anyone to access good paying jobs and fully participate in society and our democracy.

When I came to Congress, I made a commitment to improve educational opportunities and increase literacy for all - from cradle to career. As ranking member of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce training, I have unrelentingly promoted an increased focus on accessibility and affordability in higher education. Through “hard won” battles, I have worked to: increase federal investments in Pell Grants for millions of needy students; reform how student loans are financed; strengthen the capacity of Hispanic-serving Institutions, HBCUs and other Minority Serving Institutions, particularly in the STEM fields, in Vocational and Technical associate degree programs; and-expand educational opportunities for all.

In meetings with constituents across my congressional district, I have underscored the importance of education K-16 and the economic opportunities it creates. I encourage and inspire students to take rigorous academic courses, including math, science, computer science, and financial literacy to prepare them for college and future employment.

Fourteen years ago, together with President Dr. Miguel Nevarez of the University of Texas, Pan American, I spearheaded the creation of the Hispanic Engineering, Science and Technology (HESTEC) Initiative in order to promote careers in the STEM fields. I am proud to say that since 2010 alone, enrollment in STEM courses has increased by 41 percent at the university. In fact, UTRGV has graduated over 2,000 students in engineering and increased enrollment of women up to 34 percent!

In my congressional district, the increased focus on education has made a remarkable difference in increasing the educational opportunities available to all. During my tenure in Congress, high school graduation rates in our region have increased from 72 percent to 87 percent.

Moreover, college enrollment and graduation rates continue to rise. Institutions of higher learning in my district continue to expand and provide a catalyst for economic development and empowerment. The University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley recently finished its merger of two U.T. universities in Edinburg and Brownsville, in order to take advantage of economies of scale, and for the first time in our history -- to bring a medical school to the Rio Grande Valley. This new medical school will not only train a new generation of doctors and serve the health care needs of the region, but will also attract new investment, research and spur economic development, resulting in good paying jobs! I understand that 14 of today's graduates are from the UT-RGV -- Go Vaqueros!

Our three community colleges have also played a pivotal role in increasing educational attainment levels in our region and in preparing our students for good jobs and careers. South Texas College (STC), which started out as a small community college of one-thousand students and is now one of the largest Hispanic serving institutions in the nation, hitting record high enrollment this year with 34,641 students, most of whom are Hispanic. As founding Chairman of the Board of Trustees of STC prior to being elected to Congress, it swells my heart with pride to know that the College currently has five state-of-the-art campuses, three teaching centers and one virtual campus, and now offers Four baccalaureate degrees in Applied Technology and Applied Science.

By vigorously fighting to increase federal investments in the areas of most need in my district -- education, healthcare, workforce development and training, rural housing and economic development and infrastructure, my district has made astounding economic progress. During my tenure in Congress, employment in my District has increased at a faster, steadier pace than in the United States, Mexico or Texas as a whole: with the unemployment rate dropping from a whopping 22 percent in 1997 then -- to 7.7 percent today.

I must add that we in South Texas have made tremendous progress in my congressional district because of the tireless work of my congressional staff together with the many dedicated teachers, doctors, administrators, advocates, organizers, parents, community groups and other wonderful people who care and who have started grassroots efforts to stand up and make their homes and my district, a better place to live in.

I have always believed that engaging with and encouraging the development of local community leaders and creating partnerships, public and private, local,

county, state and federal is the way to achieve sustainable community development betterment efforts. Public Service is a team sport that is only successful when you have a dedicated group of people, willing to work with you and help you lead your community. Remember that in public service, your success is not measured by how big your bank account is, how many cars or houses you have, or by any other superficial measure, but rather by how much you have given back to your community and how much better off your constituents are with you leading them.

Finally, you must know that you have endless possibilities. I came to Congress because I wanted to pursue a career in public service and to help people; after having run a business for 20 years, I wanted to do even more for my community.

You may want to reflect on what you hope to accomplish, and even more importantly, what type of leadership role you want to play as a public servant.

Ladies and gentlemen, through hard work, bold leadership, and a strong sense of community, the sky is the limit.

Congratulations and thank you again for inviting me to share this special celebration with you today. I wish you success in your future service to the public and to improving the lives of Texas residents!