

## ROYBAL LEARNING CENTER -- 2010 GRADUATION SPEECH

Edward R. Roybal, Jr.

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Thank you very much. Muchísimas gracias. I am deeply honored to be the graduation speaker at the 2010 graduation of The Roybal Learning Center. On behalf of the Roybal family, I would like to thank Principal Braxton, Assistant Principal Coaloa, and the administration, faculty and staff for their hospitality and assistance; and I most especially wish to extend my congratulations to the graduating students of 2010 and their families. [In Spanish: "I wish to extend my congratulations to the graduating class of 2010 and their families."]

I know that my father would be especially proud to have had this school named in his honor. I hope you will forgive me for speaking so much about my father in these remarks; I do so because this school so plainly represents his vision and his ideals. For all his achievements and contributions on a wide range of subjects, to my father, education was always the bedrock, always at the core of his understanding of the needs of the Mexican-American and Latino community and the means by which the community might advance its interests and attain its rightful place in the fabric of American life. Contrary to what many assume, my father was not an attorney, but, rather, a social worker prior to going into politics. And, more specifically, the role in which my father never ceased to think of himself was that of a health educator.

Much has changed since my parents went to Roosevelt High School in the 1930s. My mother, for example, wanted to enroll in secretarial courses at Roosevelt High, but she was not allowed to do so on the grounds that no one would hire a Mexican as a secretary. Students were punished for speaking Spanish on campus. My father graduated in the midst of the Depression. Opportunities for higher education were highly limited. My father was widely discouraged from pursuing his goal of attending college and found support from one source only, his mother. He went on to become one of the very few Mexican-Americans to attend UCLA up to that time. He put himself through school by pressing clothes at a dry cleaner; he took the streetcar across town from his home in Boyle Heights to attend school.

Today you are graduating from a high school whose mission includes promoting lifelong learning among its graduates. We are gathered in the midst of this extraordinary campus, a school dedicated to creating a supportive and nurturing environment while maintaining high academic standards. My father would be deeply honored to know that a school with such a vision has been dedicated in his name.

I would like to say a few words about each of the academies, or small learning centers. First we have Activists for Educational Empowerment (AEE). Its mission is to create and empower a community of activists in order to reach their aspirations of higher education and social change. I would like to think that my father laid the groundwork for such a community. When he first ran for political office in the

1940s, there was virtually no organized Latino political community in the City of Los Angeles or the State of California. My father was chosen by a multi-ethnic community of activists to be the first Latino candidate for the Los Angeles City Council in almost 100 years. His original campaign committee in 1947 formed the basis of the Community Service Organization (CSO) which was the nucleus for Chicano political movement which evolved in the 1950s and 1960s. But for all the increased political power of the Latino community during that era, it is telling to note that throughout the 1950s and 1960s my father remained the only Mexican-American to hold a major political office in California.

Things have changed. Hundreds of Latinos now hold political office throughout the state and the nation. And yet there is no greater sign of this progress than a high school such as this one in the heart of the Latino community that encourages students to develop their voices, pursue their aspirations, and seek social change. Now, as you graduate, your experience at the Roybal Learning Center will assist you as you go forward to pursue the many different paths on which you are bound.

Next we have the Business and Finance Academy. When my father went to school, most of the business and finance sectors were closed to Latinos. My father in particular had an aptitude for math and at one point pursued a career as an accountant. Early in his adult life he applied for a position as an accountant with a major firm. He scored highest on the qualifying exam and was given a job interview. When he arrived at the interview, the interviewer took one look at him and told him that the job required a blue-eyed blond. Much has changed. While we are not yet in a society free of discrimination and prejudice, the fact is that for those of you graduating today, there are no limits to the opportunities before you. But I would also note that the mission of the Business and Finance Academy is to produce lifelong learners who make a positive contribution to our community and our global society. With opportunity comes a challenge to use those opportunities for community service.

Next we have the Computer Science Academy. I have to admit that I myself, and my father even more so, was somewhat technologically challenged. You might find it interesting that it was only last month that I acquired my first cell phone and my first laptop computer. But I am well ahead of the learning curve in comparison with my father. At his home in Pasadena sits a desktop computer roughly fifteen years old which crashes almost as soon as it is turned on. But this never posed a problem for my father, since he never used it. As I have said several times by now, things have changed. The average high school student takes things for granted when it comes to computers which I will probably never manage to learn. But, of course, we live in a world where computers are a vital tool for learning and communicating, and the knowledge students have acquired in this Academy provides a major tool for future success.

Finally, we have the International School of Languages. We have come a long way from when students were punished for speaking Spanish during recess. On the other hand, my parents met in the Spanish Club at Roosevelt High School. The mission of this Academy speaks of providing students with multicultural understanding to successfully communicate, work and study within a diverse and increasingly multi-ethnic society. Again, I am struck by how much this mission reflects the values and priorities of my father's life. As important as my father's role as the first Latino elected official in California in the Twentieth Century, is the fact that he pioneered the model of multi-ethnic and multi-

racial coalition politics. When he was elected, the Ninth Council District which he represented was estimated to be only about 20% Latino. My father's candidacy and his election were brought about by a coalition of Anglo, African-American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Jewish progressive activists, as well as, of course, the genesis of the Chicano movement. Also critical to his success was the active support of progressive elements within the Catholic Church. This happened in a world that never presumed that such things were possible. But it is now the world in which we live, and the one into which today's graduating students venture out to pursue their aspirations.

There is a great deal to evidence my father's lifelong commitment to education. Among his principal legacies, the main campus of The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, has been named in his honor, and the Lucille and Edward R. Roybal Foundation which he established in his lifetime has primarily been engaged in the provision of scholarships to students in the field of public health with a commitment to serve the Latino community upon graduation. And yet, I believe that, if my father were alive, it is this school, this campus, this complex of small learning communities which would fill my father with the greatest pride and satisfaction. We are here in the heart of the district which he represented both in City Council and in Congress for so many years. We sit in the community from which he came and which he served so lovingly. There is no greater tribute than to have this facility named in his honor.

To the graduating students of the Class of 2010, I join today in celebrating your achievement. I encourage you to pursue your goals, your visions, and your aspirations. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to address you this special day.

[In Spanish: "Congratulations to the class of 2010."] Congratulations to the Class of 2010.

Muchísimas gracias. Thank you very much.