

# **National Hispanic Leadership Agenda**

## MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President-elect of the United States  
VIA EMAIL

Dear President-elect Biden,

The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA) has voted to strongly endorse and recommend that you nominate U.S. Representative Ruben Gallego of Arizona, a Marine Corps combat veteran, as the next Secretary of the Navy.

The NHLA is composed of over 40 the nation's leading national Hispanic civil rights and public policy organizations. Collectively, NHLA leads advocacy on the pressing civil rights and policy issues affecting the 60 million U.S. Latinos. NHLA strives to increase Latino visibility and leverages its efforts to build a stronger Latino influence in our country's affairs.

We previously asked you to ensure that Hispanics and Latinos comprise at least 20% of your appointed positions, in number and in quality and importance, including no fewer than five in Cabinet-level positions. As a senior position in the Department of Defense, your nomination of Rep. Gallego to lead the Department of the Navy would help recognize the immense contributions of thousands of Latino servicemembers, as no Hispanic, except in an acting capacity, has served in that position since Edward Hidalgo in 1979-81, and none has ever served as Secretary of Defense.

Apart from his distinguished Marine Corps combat service, Rep. Gallego is a lifelong community organizer and leader, former Arizona State Representative, Harvard graduate, and the proud son of Hispanic immigrants from Mexico and Colombia. Much of his professional career has focused on U.S. national security and foreign policy issues, and he is widely viewed as a leader in the House Armed Services Committee, where he is an active member and the most senior Hispanic member.

Congressman Gallego served as Vice-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus for the 114th Congress and currently serves as First Vice Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and in the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel. We believe he is uniquely qualified to address the urgent goal of increasing the representation of Hispanics and other people of color in military officer recruitment and in promotion to flag officer positions, and to prioritize LGBTQ inclusion, support and retention in the Navy and the Marine Corps, especially for transgender Sailors and Marines, setting an example for all the service branches.

As Secretary of the Navy we would also look to him to help you implement the creation of a capacity building program at Hispanic Serving Institutions of Higher Education (HSI's) to be

Alianza Americas  
American G.I. Forum  
ASPIRA Association  
AVANCE Inc.  
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network  
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute  
Farmworker Justice  
GreenLatinos  
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities  
Hispanic Federation  
Hispanic National Bar Association  
Hispanics in Philanthropy  
Inter-University Program for Latino Research  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
MANA, A National Latina Organization  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund  
Mi Familia Vota  
NALEO Education Fund  
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives  
National Association of Latino Arts and Culture  
National Association of Latino Independent Producers  
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.  
National Day Laborer Organizing Network  
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators  
National Hispanic Council on Aging  
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Institute for Latino Policy  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Latinx Psychological Association  
Presente.org  
SER Jobs for Progress National  
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project  
U.S.- Mexico Foundation UnidosUS  
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute  
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce  
Voto Latino

housed within pertinent federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, to support the training and retraining of faculty and curriculum development for STEM education.

Finally, we would further look to his leadership in helping the Department of Defense to address the effectiveness of preventive protocols to recognize mental health issues among servicemembers, the effectiveness of sidearm controls, and the safety of our service members themselves, especially women of color, in light of the recent multi-branch trend of servicemember killings, as in the cases of Specialist Vanessa Guillen (USA), of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment in Fort Hood, and Airman First Class Natasha Aposhian (USAF) in a base dormitory at Grand Forks Air Force Base, both at the apparent hands of male servicemembers who were armed when they should not have been.

Congressman Ruben Gallego is committed to leading the Department of the Navy with integrity and professionalism. He believes the Navy must continue its ongoing transformation into a more modern and more flexible force that can address the challenges and threats of the 21st Century. Recent ship collisions, chronic deferred maintenance, the loss of the USS Bonhomme Richard, and long deployments for Sailors and Marines must be urgently addressed. As an Iraq War combat veteran, we are confident that Congressman Gallego will always put the safety and well-being of our Sailors and Marines first and ensure that they have the support and resources they need to serve the American people.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with you to achieve the goal of a government that looks like America.

Please have your staff contact the NHLA Chair, Thomas Saenz, MALDEF, at [tsaenz@maldef.org](mailto:tsaenz@maldef.org) or the Co-Chairs of the Government Accountability Committee, Kenneth Romero, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL), at [kromero@nhcsl.org](mailto:kromero@nhcsl.org), and Al Gallegos, National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE), at [president@nahfe.org](mailto:president@nahfe.org), if you have any questions about NHLA's position regarding this or any other appointments, or if you need our help garnering national support for the nominees we have endorsed. Please also let us know the contact information of the persons you designate as the official points of contact on this and related matters. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Saenz  
Chair, National Hispanic Leadership Agenda  
President & General Counsel  
Mexican American Legal Defense and  
Educational Fund (MALDEF)



Kenneth Romero, Co-Chair  
NHLA Government Accountability Committee  
Executive Director, National Hispanic Caucus  
of State Legislators (NHCSL)



Al Gallegos, Co-Chair  
NHLA Government Accountability Committee  
President, National Association of Hispanic  
Federal Executives (NAHFE)