



Pete Ricketts
Governor

STATE OF NEBRASKA

Latino American Commission
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For Release: Immediate
Date: October 14, 2015

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NINTH ANNUAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH STATE COMMEMORATION

LINCOLN – The 9th Annual Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration took place on Friday, October 9, at the Capitol Building in Lincoln, Neb.

The Commemoration, hosted by the Nebraska Latino American Commission (NLAC) was sponsored by McDonald's, Southeast Community College, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo and Humanities Nebraska, began with a ceremony in the Capitol second floor Rotunda at 3:30 p.m. The event observes Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska and recognizes students and community leaders for their role in helping the Latino population. More than 100 attended the event.

Adrian Sanchez, Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors, gave the Welcome to the audience of 150 people. German Murguia, representing the Consulate of Mexico, provided Opening Remarks in Spanish sharing the overall influence of Latin America to the United States naming notable Hispanic Americans such as Cesar Chavez and Dr. Ellen Ochoa for making a difference.

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts presented the State Proclamation observing Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska. He also spoke of how students can give back to their communities. Chris Beutler, Mayor of the City of Lincoln, also presented a City Proclamation recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month within Lincoln and shared how Latinos are a large part of the population and have improved the city.

Six Nebraska students, two organizations and three community leaders were honored at this year's Commemoration. NLAC Director Dr. Lazaro Spindola served as emcee.

The Keynote Speaker was Nita Gonzales, daughter of Latino civil rights leader Corky Gonzales from Denver. Nita is the current director of Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver, a school that focuses on Latino students and includes a Mexican-American Studies curriculum. She is also an education and Chicano rights activist who was honored by President Obama as a Leader for Change at the White House.

She concluded her speech by reciting her favorite passage from her father's most famous poem, "I Am Joaquin."

"I am the masses of my people and I refuse to be absorbed. I am Joaquín. The odds are great, but my spirit is strong, my faith unbreakable, my blood is pure. I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ. I shall endure, I will endure!" she said to a standing ovation from the audience.

This year was the fourth Commemoration where award recipients were nominated by the public.

Sanchez presented the four awards: Senator John McCollister (District 20) and former Senator Jeremy Nordquist (District 7) received the Humanitarian Award for their introduction



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and support of LB 623; the Inspiration Award was given to Luis Sotelo of Lexington for his school and community leadership; the Organization Award was given Madison Public Schools for initiatives to help their Latino student population; and Scottsbluff's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church received the Event Award for their Annual Fiesta, which has been bringing the community together and celebrating Mexican culture for over 40 years.

The event concluded with the recognition of the winners of the Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest, which was open to all students in grades 6 to 12. The essays were judged by a diverse jury of 21 teachers, government representatives, college students and community leaders from across the state. As a theme, students were asked to write about a quote from Julian Castro, former mayor of San Antonio, Texas, on achieving the American Dream, and how the quote relates to them.

The first place winners were invited to read their essay to the audience.

Out of 287 entries, the winners in the high school division were, from first through third place: Hillary Carrillo of Lexington High School, Pamela Canté of Lincoln's North Star High School and Martin Lagunas Nava of Omaha's Bryan Senior High School.

"Castro's quotation, although I recently heard it for the first time, has influenced me. It made me communicate with my parents about their experiences. Some of the stories they told me were melancholy, but there were lots of joyful ones too. Upon hearing these stories, I embrace my heritage and want to research my Guatemalan roots, and I am appreciative of my parents," wrote Carrillo.

In the middle school division, the winners were, from first through third place: Noah Randolph of Omaha's Brownell-Talbot Middle School, Divith Rajagopal of Lincoln's Lux Middle School and Yair Garcia of Schuyler Middle School.

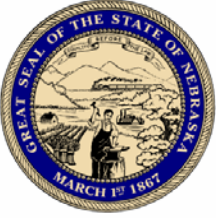
"This quote has influenced my opinion of Hispanic Heritage Month and the values it represents by reminding me of the struggles that my ancestors went through to accomplish the American Dream. My family worked very hard for many generations to get to where we are now and hopefully the next generation of my family will work towards that dream and will pass the torch onto the next generation," wrote Randolph.

The first place essays and information on Hispanic Heritage Month were published on McDonald's tray liners and are available at each McDonald's restaurant in the state. Each essay is available in its entirety on the Commission website at www.latinoac.nebraska.gov/.

After the ceremony, El Centro de las Americas hosted a reception at El Mariachi Taco Cantina in Lincoln. The event was completely free to attend, with donations being accepted to help Lincoln resident Felix Valle's medical support bills.

For those interesting in joining the Hispanic Heritage Month Planning Committee, please contact the Latino American Commission at 402-471-2791.

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