

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN JOAQUIN CASTRO

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*December 2, 2016*

*Congressman Joaquin Castro represents Texas' 20th District. Now in his third term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Joaquin serves on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, as well as the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He was the 2013 Co-President for the House freshman Democrats and serves in House Democratic Leadership as Chief Deputy Whip. Prior to his election to Congress, Rep. Castro served five terms as state representative for District 125 in the Texas Legislature. He was born in San Antonio, Texas, graduated with honors from Stanford University in 1996, and earned his J.D. from Harvard Law School in 2000.*

**HLLR: Could you talk a bit about your experience as a Latino Member of Congress? What challenges and opportunities has this role presented?**

Rep. Castro: I have the opportunity to share a perspective that isn't regularly heard on Capitol Hill, but is very common in my district and across the United States. I'm able to be a voice for folks who are underrepresented in this nation's leadership. Any big issues the Congress considers —things like healthcare, taxes, immigration, defense — affect the Latino community. Their views and experiences need to be a part of the decision-making process in Washington, and I'm glad to help make that possible. Such a large segment of our country's population must not be overlooked when policy is crafted. Day-to-day, I face the same challenges any other Democratic member of Congress faces.

**HLLR: You have previously talked about the line Latinos must walk between embracing one's identity and being pigeon-holed as the "Latino Congressman" —what advice would you give for those that face a similar struggle, whether it be in the political, business, or legal world?**

Rep. Castro: There's a balance each individual strikes, and that's a personal judgement. I'd say that folks should not hide who they are – they should always be themselves. I've introduced legislation on issues ranging from cybersecurity to veterans homelessness. I've founded Congressional Caucuses on expanding access to Pre-K and strengthening U.S.-Japan relations. With these and other efforts, I believe I've broken the narrow preconception folks may have of how a "Latino Congressman" operates.

I focus on creating opportunity for the people I represent. From education, to job creation, to infrastructure, to national security, I advocate for policies that will make my constituents', and all Americans', lives better.

Essentially, I always try to do my job to the best of my ability. If folks of any background, in any industry, work their hardest, they increase their odds of earning respect and finding success.

**HLLR: Has your Latino identity informed or influenced your legal practice? Has your legal training given you any insight into what it means to be a Latino American?**

Rep. Castro: Like people of any background, my life experiences and the views I've formed because of them influenced my legal practice and influence my work in Congress.

**HLLR: Latinos are drastically underrepresented in law and politics. What do you see as the biggest barriers to Latinos in pursuing a career in these fields?**

Rep. Castro: First —for a long time, there weren't many examples of Latinos in law and politics for young people to look up to and aspire to emulate. Without those figures, it's hard to envision yourself in those leadership positions.

Second —Latinos still lag behind other groups of students when it comes to graduating college. That discrepancy is due to a variety of causes: the exorbitant expense of higher education in the United States, the lack of guidance provided to students in middle and high school, and the challenge of balancing a job with studies, to name a few.

Third —the high cost of launching a career in either of those fields. Paying for law school is a huge burden for a family to take on, and a political campaign at any level requires quite a bit of money to get off the ground.

I'm working in Congress to break down these barriers by building out something I call the "Infrastructure of Opportunity." Here's what I mean by that: just as there's an infrastructure of streets and highways to get us where we want to get on the road, I believe there's an infrastructure of opportunity in the United States that help folks get to where they want to go in life. That infrastructure consists of institutions like great schools, accessible health-care, and well-paying jobs that allow people to provide for themselves and their families. Each day, I work to expand that infrastructure so that everyone in our country can pursue their dreams.

**HLLR: What do you see as the biggest challenges facing Latino communities in the U.S.? What do you see as the biggest strength within the Latino community in the U.S.?**

Rep. Castro: Beyond the education issues I just mentioned, I think one of our greatest challenges at this moment is something that we can ultimately turn into a real strength. We are a large and growing segment of the population in America and we have an opportunity to significantly influence the direction of this country. Folks who are eligible to vote need to register, and then they

need to turn out on Election Day. If more people from our community participated in our democracy, we could really tap into that strength we hold.

**HLLR: In this last election cycle there was some inflammatory rhetoric about Latinos. How do you see this rhetoric, and how do you think Latino Americans should see it? Do you have a message to Latinos who may feel alienated from the political process because of it?**

Rep. Castro: Our president-elect began his campaign by slandering Mexican immigrants and later Mexican-Americans, and sadly that set the tone for a lot of the ugliness we saw during this divisive election. Latino Americans can't get discouraged though — we have to prove the bullies and misinformed folks in our country wrong. Let's work even harder in our careers, encourage our young people to succeed, and show our resilience in this challenging time. The Latino community is strong, hardworking, and vibrant. Let's get even more politically involved — folks can volunteer on a campaign or run for office. We have the power to outshine the naysayers and change this country for the better. Don't withdraw because of this rhetoric, use it as motivation to improve our society.

**HLLR: You have spoken about the American Dream, with regard to both your parents and yourself; it has always been an important ideal to all Americans, but particularly to minority communities. Do you think the idea of the American Dream has changed from generation to generation? How would you characterize the American Dream today?**

Rep. Castro: As our world has evolved over the generations —with developments in technology, for example —some small details of the American Dream may have changed, but the overarching desire remains the same. People come to this nation to find opportunity for themselves and to open up greater opportunities for their kids. A few years ago, my brother Julian said that “the American dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation. But each generation passes on to the next the fruits of their labor.” I think that idea gets to the heart of what the American Dream is all about —each generation wanting to create a better life for the next. I don't think that dream will ever change.

