

# CALIFORNIA LATINO LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

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By Solomon O. Smith | California Black Media

The California Latino Legislative Caucus (CLLC) celebrated its 50th anniversary with a black-tie event at the Orpheum Theatre in downtown Los Angeles last Friday. The event was a retrospective awards ceremony, honoring the achievements of the caucus over the past five decades.

Initially known as the Chicano Legislative Caucus, the CLLC was made up of five male Latino members: Alex Garcia, Peter Chacon, Joseph Montoya, Ray Gonzales and Richard Alatorre, [according to their history page](#).

Today, under the leadership of Sabrina Cervantes (D-Riverside), the first LGBTQ+ leader and chair of the CLLC, the caucus boasts 38 members, with a majority of 21 Latinas. Cervantes recognized the significant expansion of the caucus over the past 50 years.

"The issues that are bringing us together as Latinos are California issues, whether it's housing insecurity and affordability, looking at just the economic disparities that exist," said Cervantes. "These are all issues that have continued to be a priority for our caucus and issues that many of our members fight on."

Martha Escutia, the first woman to chair the CLLC and a former member of the California Senate and Assembly with over 16 years in politics was featured in a short film played at the celebration. The film, narrated by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the writer and star of "Hamilton," traced the 50-year history of the caucus.



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Escutia considered the 1980 reapportionment which allowed for greater representation of the Latino community, as a key turning point. While she takes pride in the caucus' accomplishments, she believes there is still more to be achieved.

"The problems are still the same: lack of housing, lack of economic sustainability for families, just even building a safety net for families," said Escutia. "It's still an issue that bedevils, frankly, all caucuses because I think, the Black Caucus also has the same concerns, as well as even the Asian American-Pacific Islander caucus."

Hilda Solis, who is supervisor for the First District, Los Angeles County, presented a congratulatory document from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors at the red-carpet event to Cervantes and the caucus' vice chair, California State Senator Lena Gonzalez.

Solis, a former member of the California Assembly and Senate, is the first Latina to serve in a presidential Cabinet as U.S. Secretary of Labor.

The evening's speakers were some of the most accomplished artists, actors, politicians, and public servants in the Latino community.

The Masters of Ceremonies for the event were Tony Plana, an activist, director, and actor known for his role in "Ugly Betty" and Justina Mochado, an actor and producer, known for her performance in the series, "The Horrors of Delores Roach," and "One Day at a Time."

[Xavier Becerra](#), the 25th Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, was the keynote speaker. His rise through the ranks of the California legislative system has been a testament to overcoming obstacles.

He began his political career in the California state assembly, progressed to the U.S. House of Representatives, and then served as the 33rd attorney general of California, before assuming his current position under President Joe Biden. He talked about how far the state, and the caucus, have come saying "so goes the caucus, so goes the state of California."

The evening's celebrations were not just about the caucus's legislative achievements. The awards also acknowledged the efforts made by and for the Hispanic community. Poets Yesika Salgado and Yosimar Reyes performed a poem that encapsulated the experiences of young Latino immigrants.

The event also featured a segment dedicated to giving back. Sixty-one students from across the state took to the stage to express their gratitude to the caucus for their support of higher education. The [California Latino Legislative Caucus Foundation](#) gave \$5,000 to each student who represented different regions across the state.

The evening concluded with the presentation of the Legacy Award to multiple organizations. The recipients included the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, accepted by Thomas Saenz; the United Farm Workers, received by Teresa Romero; and the California Rural Legal Assistance, accepted by Jessica Jewell.

Musical and special performances were spread throughout the show. The band Quitapenas, Jesse Garcia, and others celebrated and performed. The evening ended with a musical performance by music legend Andy Vargas and his band. Vargas is a beloved member of Santana and a giant in the Latin music scene.

According to CLLC vice chair, Sen. Lena Gonzalez (D-Long Beach), the future of the caucus hinges on its capacity to advance legislation and advocate for an inclusive agenda.

"We'll continue to fight to make sure that our voices are heard along with our brothers and sisters in the Black Caucus, API caucus and LGBTQ caucus," said Gonzalez. "It's a collective for all of us to be a part of, and when we push together, I think we're more unified. Looking at next year to think about how we can partner up with our other ethnic caucuses."

**There are no comments yet.**