

Welcome
Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association Visit
November 14, 2018

I want to begin by thanking OLAS President Jonah Badiab for inviting me to participate in tonight's program. I always enjoy visiting with the Organization of Latin American Students. Not only is OLAS one of Eastern's most active student clubs, the heritage we share as Latinos means there has always been a special place in my heart for OLAS.

I also want to thank Alfredo Fernández and the other members of the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association who are visiting with us tonight for taking time to share how Latino students can prepare for law careers.

CHBA is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year and continues to do an outstanding job in mentoring future attorneys and supporting Hispanics new to the law profession. Thank you for that support!

Latinos are fortunate today to share the rights and privileges enjoyed by most Americans, but we have had to fight for those rights. Call us Latinos or Hispanics, we have been treated differently in this country and have struggled for social and economic equality.

The great union leader Cesar Chavez once said, “There is no substitute for hard work. And there is no substitute for patience...” He also encouraged Hispanics to “work together ... to organize themselves to solve their own problems...”

We have been patient, but we have not stood idle. We have worked together, and we have realized over time that we have the capacity to change our lives and gain a foothold in the U.S. economy. But it has been a struggle.

50 years ago, Latinos in Connecticut—most of them from Puerto Rico—had to settle for picking tobacco, mushrooms, or other produce; or worked in factories like the poultry processing plant and the thread company here in Willimantic. They were paid low wages, they worked long hours in dangerous conditions, and there was no hope for advancement.

Today, thanks to organizations like the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association, Latinos have opportunities to dream larger, to achieve careers that their parents and grandparents didn't have. Latino students on this campus are winning scholarships and internships, and being hired in well-paying jobs as tomorrow's attorneys, doctors, business leaders, and elected officials.

And they are being supported by campus organizations such as OLAS. For several decades, the Organization of Latin American Students has been offering young men and women leadership opportunities on our campus while holding up our common heritage as something to celebrate and be proud of. OLAS President Badiab is a great example of how talented and hard-working Latino students are on this campus. Thanks to Attorney Fernandez and his colleagues, Jonah interned at the Shipman and Goodwin law firm this past summer and did a wonderful job. That should be no surprise to anyone. And with programs like tonight's event, Hispanics in a variety of professions are providing advice and opportunities to more Latino students across our state and beyond.

We know that America is more supportive of Latinos than it was 50 years ago. There are more of us here, and we have much more political and economic power than we did a half-century ago. Half the growth in the U.S. population is due to Latinos, two-thirds of them born right here in the United States. And half the Latinos in this country are under the age of 29—the future is YOU!

We also have economic power—\$2 trillion in Gross Domestic Product. If Latinos in America formed their own country, it would have the world's seventh largest economy!

This progress has been due to the fact we have been determined to help ourselves, through hard work, solidarity, and thoughtful planning.

I look forward to seeing the current members of OLAS make their own special contributions to our Great American Democracy when they graduate, and I ask each of you to find ways to give back—not only to the communities you will be part of, but to the University that helped you get started.

Again, to OLAS, I say Si se Puede. I am Proud of You. To our guests from CHBA, I say Gracias . . . We Are Honored. And to everyone, I say . . . Keep up the Good Work. Our future is bright because of you!