

**REMARKS OF
FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ
UNIDOSUS ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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Thank you, Dr. Harper-Marinick, for that generous introduction. Thank you to Janet Murguía and the entire team at UnidosUS for this extraordinary honor, and for nearly sixty years of fighting for a stronger America for Latino communities and for all of us. Congratulations to tonight's other honorees, including Congressman Castro, and to everyone UnidosUS is recognizing this evening. I am honored to share this stage with all of you.

I will admit that standing up here accepting this recognition is not something I expected. This award has almost always gone to journalists, and for good reason. Journalists are often the real heroes in moments like the one we are living through right now, when the First Amendment itself is under sustained attack. They ask the hard questions. They show up to cover stories that are inconvenient for the powerful. Many of them do that work knowing it could cost them their access, their relationships, or their jobs. In too many countries around the world, reporters risk far more than that. They risk their freedom, and sometimes their lives, but they do the work anyway because they understand that a free press is not a luxury. It is the foundation on which everything else in a democracy depends. To be recognized alongside that tradition means more to me than I can fully express tonight.

It is also deeply humbling to receive an award that carries Ruben Salazar's name. Salazar gave his life covering a story that powerful people wanted buried, and more than fifty years later his name still calls journalists back to the responsibility of telling the truth regardless of the cost. That is a legacy worth living up to, and I do not take lightly the fact that his name is now attached to mine.

To be honest, when I joined the FCC, I also did not expect that defending the First Amendment would become one of the central fights of my career. But that is exactly where we find ourselves today. For almost two years I have watched this administration wage a deliberate campaign of censorship and control against broadcasters and journalists. That is part of why I launched my First Amendment Tour, and what I heard on the road surprised me. People from every corner of the country are united in their concern about what this FCC is doing to press freedom.

I have sat across from station owners who have told me that they are genuinely afraid of being dragged before the FCC simply for doing their jobs. I have heard from a respected journalist whose own broadcaster told him his contract would be ended early, not because of his ratings or his conduct, but because his past coverage had angered this administration and they did not want to risk angering it further. This administration has become remarkably skilled at building that kind of fear, and not just with journalists and broadcasters. Universities, law firms, and countless other institutions have faced the same pressure to fall in line rather than risk becoming the next target.

I am well aware there is a cost to saying these things out loud. Many of my Democratic colleagues at other independent commissions have already lost their seats for standing their

ground. But as I have said before, if I am removed from the FCC, it will not be because I failed to do my job. It will be because I insisted on doing it. I have accepted that risk, and I would accept it again, because the alternative is far worse. That's why I have spent my time pushing companies, broadcasters, and public officials to find their courage, and I'm happy to say it is starting to work. Most recently Disney found its own courage by refusing to let the government decide who counts as a real journalist and what counts as real news.

Courage like that matters, because courage is contagious. Seeing someone else find theirs reminds you that yours was there all along. That courage existed in Ruben Salazar when he kept reporting despite the threats against him for telling the truth. It exists in every journalist still asking hard questions, and it exists in every one of you in this room who has ever spoken up when it would have been easier to stay quiet.

So that is my ask of all of us tonight. Find that courage and use it. Push back, stand up, and defend the First Amendment as if our democracy depends on it, because it does.

Thank you again for this incredible honor.