Speech by Jeffrey Davidow, president of the Institute of the Americas  
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San Diego Chicano Federation  

For 40 years, the Chicano Federation has been an instrumental and giving element of San Diego. The Federation has become one of San Diego’s leading and most respected not-for-profit organizations.  

On a daily basis it contributes necessary help and services to children, to seniors, to those who need help to house themselves or combat illness and poverty.  

For 20 years, Ray Uzueta has given direction and leadership to this organization and today, as we should everyday, we celebrate his commitment and his caring.  

While we celebrate we must also recommit.  

Recommit to do more in health and all of the other services.  

Recommit to confronting the most essential challenge which is to prepare our youth for the difficult, challenging and changing world ahead. There is no greater contribution than any of us can make than educating the next generation, and that generation must be better trained and more technologically savvy than we are.  

And, we must recommit to the initial impetus and motivation of this organization -- to reinforce the need for respect of the Chicano community and indeed all people.  

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not a politician, but like you, I am a concerned American and I am bothered and offended by what I see as a growing level of disrespect and even hate in this country.  

There are many reasons for all Americans to be upset about our immigration system. It is, to put it simply, broken and needs to be fixed.  

But we cannot allow the legitimate concern about the failures of the system to be used as a mask to cover the old illness of racism.  

Let me remind you, no one is rounding up undocumented Canadians in Minnesota. And anyone who says the Arizona law does not have a racist bias is either naïve or willfully obscuring the truth.  

There is an irony in all of this. I think that the United States is much less afflicted with racism today than it was 40 years ago when the founders of the Chicano federation began their efforts to challenge stereotyping and to give an appropriate political voice to the San Diego community. Since the 1960s we have become a more open, tolerant country. We have become more American in the best sense of the word.
Nevertheless, the germs of fear and hatred are never fully eradicated and tend to multiply in the petrie dish of economic insecurity.

What do we do – Chicanos and non-Chicanos – Americans all of us?

First, we must educate ourselves. There is still a great deal of confusion and uncertainty about the Arizona law.

We need to know the facts. (In this regard, the Institute of the Americas at UCSD will be offering a seminar next Thursday morning to talk specifically about the constitutional issues involved. I invite you all. You can consult our website iamericas.org for more information.)

Secondly, we must make common cause with all those who speak for justice and common sense to find a way to fix our broken immigration system.

Let’s not kid ourselves. This is not going to be easy. If it were easy, it would have been done already.

I had the honor to sit with George Bush and Vicente Fox in February, 2001, in Guanajuato when President Bush committed to look for positive and constructive change on immigration. It did not happen. President Bush was, I truly believe, serious, but he underestimated the political opposition that he would confront.

What we need now is a new political commitment to construct a new system.

Comprehensive immigration reform – has to be precisely that – COMPREHENSIVE.

It must deal with issue of the 11 million or more undocumented people living in this country.

It must deal with the question of temporary workers.

It must ensure safety and equity for those workers

It must look for a way to speed up the granting of resident visas to those who qualify.

AND, most importantly it must reduce the number of undocumented aliens coming into the country. Realistically, there cannot be a new path for legalization for the undocumented already here without a commitment to decrease the flow of new entrants. That’s not politics, that’s logic.

The experience of the reform of 1986 which led to the very laudable legalization of over 3 million undocumented was sold to the American people as a way of putting an end to the undocumented issue. It did not work because of poor enforcement.
There may be many ways to accomplish these goals, and that’s what we should be talking about. The simplistic approach of walls along the border is not the answer. We have to be smarter than that. But whatever we develop – and I personally favor a biometric national identity card – that cannot be tampered with, is going to require new resources, new laws and new commitments.

As I said at the outset, this is a day for celebration and commitment. I hope that I have not been overly intense in my remarks. Let us celebrate where we have all come from, let’s honor the Chicano Federation and let’s commit to the path ahead.