



MARY ANN GÓMEZ

President & CEO of the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI).

Mary Ann Gómez joined the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI) in 2011. She strongly believes that diverse points of view create exponentially better results for all, and it is with that passion and commitment she prepares and promotes Hispanic college students to be global leaders at CHLI. She has enhanced and created programs that promote diversity of thought, increase awareness of contributions by Americans of Hispanic heritage and partnered with national and international organizations to create networks to support thoughtful decision making and collaboration to benefit Hispanic communities.

Mary Ann currently serves as the Chair of the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility. She earned a B.A. in Communications at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California and an MBA at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California. A teacher, coach, and connector at heart, she has taught public relations, business, marketing and public speaking at American University, University of Phoenix and Heald College.

The American Brief

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Designed and launched by the Fundación Consejo España - EE.UU., **The American Brief** releases a monthly series of transcribed interviews on current topics to American personalities from politics, business, culture and academics.

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Let's start with a very simple but, in our view, very pertinent question: What does "leadership" mean?

Leadership to me means an individual or group responsible and accountable for guiding and empowering a team towards a shared vision where everyone is enrolled in its success with integrity, transparency and respect.

How important is to be a good leader nowadays? Do we really have global leaders good enough to rise to the occasion?

Good leadership has always been important for the sustainable success of a community, company or country. We have all seen across our countries

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that nowadays leaders are being confronted with new issues and old wounds that have not been addressed or healed.

There is space and need for more empathy from leaders now, more than ever before, because we are more connected with each other than we have ever been. For example, trade issues, foreign relations and now the global pandemic have brought us closer together than in previous years. Dialogues and negotiations are not easy in any business, but we need leaders to take action, not just meet and have conversations.

How difficult is it for women and minorities to reach a leadership role in our societies?

In the United States, reaching a leadership role for women and minorities (Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and Native American) is improving albeit at a much slower pace than most of us appreciate. According to research conducted by Catalyst, in 2019, the proportion of women in senior management roles globally grew to 29%. In 2020, the percentage remains the same. The region with the highest percentage of women in senior management varied. The report shows that Africa led with 38% and Asia Pacific had the lowest at 27%. It is a concern around the world.



The challenges women face in reaching leadership positions starts at the beginning. Women have to choose the timing of when they start a family as they are also starting a career. Meanwhile, men in many cases give the up and coming positions to other men instead of the women or minorities. And although women and minorities are qualified for leadership positions or have the potential to be one step away from them, they find themselves going through a lot more assignments with high expectations on results that are not asked of others. The numbers will only increase when male leaders make promoting women and minorities a priority.

We cannot ignore the utmost importance of education to shape the leaders of the future. Considering that many global leaders have chosen the United States to study, how does the American educational model foster leadership?

A growing number of American colleges and universities are adding programs and related classes to foster the principles of leadership. Universities also introduce students to power of community through sororities, fraternities and other social and educational clubs. All those provide leadership opportunities and lessons in working with others for a greater common interest. Non-profits traditionally focused on health and workforce training have started developing leadership programs as well. And universities have started partnering with local non-profits to provide internships for college students so they may learn beyond the classroom. Consortiums have also grown to leverage the collective resources of individual organizations to create a network of leaders and provide professional development. One such group is Lideramos. It is a consortium of non-profits, leadership organizations, that serve the Hispanic community and are led by Hispanics.

Founded in 2003, the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI) is a non-profit and non-partisan organization dedicated to fostering a broad awareness of the diversity of

thought, heritage, interests and views of Americans of Hispanic and Portuguese descent.

As we do not have in our congressional system in Spain an analogous institution devoted to defending the interests of ethnic minorities in Congress, can we learn a little bit more about CHLI's mission, history, main achievements and future?

The CHLI Institute was founded by members of Congress to advance the Hispanic community's



economic progress with a focus on social responsibility and global competitiveness. One key area to drive the mission has been through internships for Hispanic college students. The CHLI Global Leaders Internship Program places students in the office of a member of Congress and then in a government relations office of a major corporation. That combination exposes students to the public and private sectors and its leaders in Washington, D.C. The relationships established during the internship provide the foundation for a life-time of connections to support their careers. Under my leadership, we started the annual Trade & International Affairs Symposium in 2012 during Hispanic Heritage Month to celebrate the contributions of Hispanics in trade and promote careers in foreign policy, trade and international diplomacy.

CHLI's vision states: Advancing the Hispanic Community's Diversity of Thoughts. How does the institution fulfill its purpose?

CHLI fulfills the richness of the diversity of thought among Hispanics on a daily basis. In particular, the board of directors is comprised of leaders who have a variety of professional, academic and personal backgrounds. The leadership also includes members of the Republican and Democratic parties that add to the diverse points of view from which to study and learn from. All our programs are designed to have diversity from the

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people to the topics to the points of view. It is important that as leaders in the Hispanic community, we invite non-Hispanics to join us in dialogue and programs because only then will we learn from each other and learn how we can work together for the greater good of the country.

In general terms, how has the Hispanic Community in the United States been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Unfortunately, the Hispanic community has been hit hard by COVID-19 pandemic. We have lost many loved ones, we have lost homes, and we have lost many jobs. We have not lost our resolve and we continue to support each other and push for the resources we need in our communities to provide for the unexpected hardships.

How does social and economic inequality affect in such an unexpected health crisis as the one provoked by COVID-19?

The social and economic hit to Hispanics from the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in losses that will take a long time to recover. Consider a study



by the Economic Policy Institute in September 2019, that reported between 2000 and 2018, the Hispanic household median income grew 0.1% to \$51,450 compared to the non-Hispanic white median household income increase to \$70,642. What was already a slow increase, and now you add this economic hit, feels like we are regressing. We are seeing families once apart because of work and school are now getting back together to save money and help each other. Then you add in the mental health challenges and that slows down productivity and shows up in school or work.

How has the pandemic impacted CHLI's programs and what are your expectations and main concerns for the coming months?

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CHLI’s programs immediately pivoted to virtual formats and kept going. We did have a decrease in sponsorships, but we are financially secure. Our Global Leaders Internship Program was impacted in March and the students and their supervisors were great. Everyone learned how to create a virtual internship environment and the students gained new experiences in how to quickly adjust to unforeseen circumstances, found their internal resilience they didn’t know they had and we provided them with new tools such as memberships to Spotify for their mental health. Our summer Future Leaders Conference was also virtual, and our upcoming Trade & International Affairs Symposium on November 18 will be virtual. We always say we are a CHLI familia, and I’m proud to share that the board of directors, advisory council members, staff and interns continue to show resiliency during this pandemic.

The National Hispanic Heritage Month is held every year from September 15 to October 15 since 1988 to celebrate the history, the culture and the accomplishments of Hispanic



Americans. How important is this celebration nowadays?

The National Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations across the country are critical to showcasing the contributions of Americans of Hispanic heritage. It is an opportunity for us to share and teach those who are not familiar with our contributions. And it is also a great time for us to reconnect. Many of us take this time to share our stories and histories with corporate executives, government officials and students to highlight successes, point of areas of opportunity and growth.

What does it mean to you and to your organization to be able to commemorate those roots, which are often undervalued or even silenced?

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Commemorating roots of any culture is important. It is a sense of pride for us at CHLI to be able to share our collective stories and use them to encourage younger generations to achieve more, have greater positive impact and contribute to the country's success. Since our establishment, we have touched thousands of young professionals through our programs, all the while reinforcing the many contributions Hispanics have made to the United States.

Current President of the United States Donald Trump and Democrat candidate Joe Biden have just accepted the nomination of their respective parties to run for the presidency of the United States. Meanwhile, violent protests against the abuse of police force continue in the streets throughout the country, aggravating the racial conflict. In this convulsed and polarized scenario, how do you think the election campaign is going to evolve?

Every year we have a presidential election, the country's deficiencies become front and center. This year the combination of COVID-19 and the protests against racial injustice have added new aspects to the campaigns. I am hopeful that as in times before, we get through the rough spots with greater understanding and clarity for what we need to do from legislation and practices at the local level to the national level. Coming together does not alone resolve the deep hurt of racism. We must come together with practical solutions and respect that all will not be put into place at the same time and have immediate results. Wounds take time to heal and both our physical wounds and our mental ones right now need deep healing.

Are Latino leaders playing a key role to temper radical discourses?

Latino led organizations and Latino leaders are uniting with other leaders in efforts to calm down the intense discourses around COVID-19's impact to the community and racism. As the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility, I encourage the other 13 national organizations that comprise the coalition to support each other's efforts. The heavy lifting of this work is at the local level where the counties take a larger role in implementing policies where people can see the changes that will improve their lives.

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How is COVID-19 going to affect the elections? And the Hispanic vote?

Among us Latino leaders, we are hopeful that everyone who can vote, does so for themselves, their families and for those who cannot vote because they are not citizens. We are using traditional media and social media to communicate where to register to vote, how to prepare and where they vote in person. We are encouraging people to vote early if that is available to them, vote by mail or make plans to go to the voting polls on November 3rd. It is important that if they go to the voting poll on election day, that they wear a face covering and plan to social distance for their safety and of others. We are also reinforcing that the election is not only for the President of the United States and to make time to learn about the candidates who are running for positions to represent them from the state to the local levels because many of the daily priorities in their lives lie in those offices and at the local level.

