



JOAQUIN CASTRO

Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas's 20th District, Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Vice Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Honorary Chairman of the United States – Spain Council.

Joaquin Castro was born in San Antonio, Texas on September 16, 1974; a second generation Mexican American. After finishing high school a year early, Joaquin left San Antonio to graduate with honors from Stanford University in 1996. He then went on to attend Harvard Law School where he received his Juris Doctorate degree in 2000. Upon his return to San Antonio at 28 years old, Joaquin joined a private law practice and was elected to the Texas Legislature. He served five terms as state representative for District 125. In 2012, Joaquin was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives as representative of Texas' 20th Congressional District, which covers a large portion of San Antonio and Bexar County.

Now in his fourth term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Joaquin serves on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, as well as the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the House Education and Labor Committee.

The American Brief

June 2020

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.

...

From a general perspective, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the state of Texas? Which areas of the state and population groups have been hit the hardest? Were the health services ready enough to confront the pandemic?

The coronavirus pandemic has devastated the state of Texas. Every community from small towns to big cities has been negatively impacted, especially congregant settings such as nursing homes, meatpacking plants, prisons and detention centers. Unfortunately, both state and federal officials were slow to respond and provide personal protection equipment, testing, tracing, and effectively

“The efforts of our health care and essential workers have been heroic and represent the true spirit of our nation.



flatten the curve and slow the spread. The efforts of our health care and essential workers have been heroic and represent the true spirit of our nation. This crisis is far from over and we must continue to do everything in our power to save lives.

On June 3, Texas started the third phase of the ongoing plan to Open Texas. What do you think about the measures undertaken by the Texas Department of State Health Service to minimize the spread of COVID-19? What are the main strategies established by the authorities to recover from the economic and social crisis and how can the Spanish companies based in Texas cooperate to boost the recovery efforts?

Texas reopened at a rapid pace and as a result the number of cases and hospitalizations are rising again. Private enterprises have tried to institute social distancing and facemasks and do their part to slow the spread of COVID-19, including Spanish companies. Congress also enacted swift, bipartisan legislation to mitigate the economic fallout from the coronavirus, which expanded unemployment benefits, extended forgivable loans to small business, opened lines of credit through the Federal Reserve, and prevented an even worse recession. We know that prolonged periods of unemployment harm workers and families long-term so our focus must be to contain the coronavirus to give consumers and companies the confidence they need to restart economic activity.

The Latino community in the United States has been particularly affected by the Coronavirus Disease. Throughout the country, Latinos are mainly employed in essential sectors such as food industry (supermarkets, meat processing factories), cleaning (waste collection, domestic work) and elder care. Has this fundamental role of the Latino labor force in the first-line struggle against the pandemic been recognized enough by the civil society?

For generations, Latinos have contributed to our nation's prosperity and the Hispanic community

“ The consequences of this crisis are severe and will require the government to invest in people’s wellbeing like never before.

is fundamental to the United States’ economic success. I do believe that essential workers like farmworkers and meatpackers—disproportionately Latinos and immigrants—are being recognized for their sacrifices, but the next step is to match that reality with higher pay, better benefits, and more opportunity for upward mobility. Latino families and communities have been decimated by COVID-19. During the Great Recession, Latinos lost two-thirds of household wealth, and we were just starting to gain a sliver of economic security when the coronavirus shut everything down. The consequences of this crisis are severe and will require the government to invest in people’s wellbeing like never before.

In the past weeks, two African American men, George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks, were killed during arrest by police officers in Minneapolis and Atlanta. As a result, the movement Black Lives Matter quickly spread across the United States and worldwide calling to stop police violence and the excessive use of force against black people. What is your position on this

regard? What kind of measures do you propose for immediate application to stop abuse of force?

Police brutality and racial injustice are not new challenges in America, but now with new technologies like smart phones and body cameras these atrocities are filmed and go viral around the world. Black lives matter. The question is how we will make that value a reality. We need to make a whole host of reforms to policing: ban choke holds and no knock warrants, end qualified immunity that shields law enforcement from accountability, establish a model use of force standard and collect data on excessive force incidents, mandate body cameras and end racial profiling. There are so many common sense changes we can make to prevent misconduct, increase transparency, and hold officers accountable to save lives.

“ **Black lives matter. The question is how we will make that value a reality.**

The emerging movement fighting systemic racism raised after George Floyd’s death has also led to vandalism against statues of Christopher Columbus, Ponce de León or Fray Junípero Serra, historical figures now accused of

racism and genocide. How does this kind of violent reactions affect the efforts carried out by several local administrations, cultural associations and private individuals to value the Spanish presence and recognize the Hispanic heritage in the United States? Do you think it would be possible to put things into a reasonable perspective after this outbreak?

The immense pain we see in U.S. communities right now is a culmination of centuries of white supremacy and systemic racism. Over the last few years, there has been a national conversation about the presence of statues that glorify individuals who betrayed and divided our nation to advance the cause of slavery. I believe there should be a democratic process to remove statues and local communities should ultimately decide whether they remain standing. In my hometown of San Antonio, we are proud of our Hispanic heritage. For example, the Spanish Missions are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We can both recognize the dark parts of history and also shine a light on injustice for a better future.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus advocates for important issues to the Hispanic community through the Congressional legislative process and it is also strongly committed to equality and diversity. On this regard, how does the Caucus work on the resolution of the major

problem of structural racism that still shakes the American society?

One of the most overlooked aspects of how structural racism impacts society is the role that Hollywood, publishing, and the media play in shaping the perceptions of the Latino community. Imagine being an 8-year-old Latina and never reading about people who look like you in books or seeing people from your community in movies. Imagine being an older white person and only seeing stereotypes of Hispanics as criminals and drug dealers, and never learning about the contributions of Latinos in school. Negative narratives and stereotypes contribute to a vicious cycle of toxic politics and harmful policy. As Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, I've been pushing these industries both privately and publicly to improve diversity and inclusion. Progress will not happen in one term or even one generation, but I believe we can build a movement that produces long-term change.

“Negative narratives and stereotypes contribute to a vicious cycle of toxic politics and harmful policy. As Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, I've been pushing these industries both privately and publicly to improve diversity and inclusion.



In January 2018, you took office as Honorary Chairman of the United States – Spain Council after Senator Tim Kaine. How do you value this experience so far, personally and professionally? How can the institution and its sister organization in Spain, the Fundación Consejo España – EE.UU., strengthen the relationship between both countries?

This has been a fantastic and fruitful experience. We hosted last year’s forum in my hometown, San Antonio, and it was great being able to identify our shared history, cultural similarities, and differen-

ces. I highly value cultural exchange because it creates space for people to embrace our differences in a personal way. Professionally, I think our exchanges have been beneficial for both countries given the fragile state of diplomacy under the Trump Administration. Now more than ever, Congress plays a critical role in maintaining and reassuring diplomatic relations globally. This organization has facilitated that effort in making sure the U.S.-Spain friendship remains strong.

