

U.S. HISPANIC LEADERS PROGRAM **Madrid, Bilbao and San Sebastian - 22 to 27 October 2023**

PARTICIPANTS



Teresa Acuña

Deputy Director of the Good Jobs Initiative and Senior Policy Advisor for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor

Teresa Acuña is Deputy Director of the Good Jobs Initiative and senior policy advisor with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor.

For over ten years, Teresa held various political, legislative, and programmatic leadership roles at the state and national level. She leads teams in addressing economic inequality, exploring the future of work, and creating good jobs in the green economy. She formerly served as Legislative Director in the U.S. House of Representatives and California State Legislature.

Teresa holds a master's degree in public administration from Harvard Kennedy School, where she was the Roy and Lila Ash Fellow and Sheila C. Johnson Leadership Fellow.



Melanie Fontes Rainer

Director of the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Melanie serves as the Director of the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services where she leads the Department's enforcement of federal civil rights and privacy laws and directs related policy and strategic initiatives.

Previously, Melanie served as Counselor to Health & Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra, providing strategy guidance to the Secretary on issues pertaining to civil rights, patient privacy, reproductive health, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), competition in healthcare, equity, and the private insurance market. In this role, she led the implementation of the bipartisan No Surprises Act, helping to increase transparency in medical billing and save consumers money. She also served as the Secretary's designee on the White House Competition Council leading cross-cutting Department work and a whole-of-Government approach on price

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transparency, costs, and competition to benefit American consumers. She also sits on the White House Reproductive Healthcare Access Task Force.

Before joining the Biden-Harris Administration, Melanie served as the Special Assistant to the Attorney General and Chief Health Care Advisor at the California Department of Justice, where she led a national team to save the Affordable Care Act and protect healthcare coverage for over 133 million Americans. During this time, she facilitated the creation of a new office, the Health Care Rights and Access Office, devoted to proactively advancing laws pertaining to health care, civil rights, privacy, competition, and consumer protection. Melanie also worked on multiple groundbreaking settlements, such as the \$575 million historic settlement against one of the largest health systems in California to increase competition and consumer choice in the state and multiple bipartisan settlements to address the national opioid epidemic.

Melanie previously served in the U.S. Senate as a Senior Aide and Women's Policy Director to Chair Patty Murray on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the Budget Committees. In these roles, she helped pass several transformative health care laws, including the 21st Century Cures Act, Every Student Succeeds Act, and the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, among other laws and led the Senate's work on the Affordable Care Act, reproductive rights, and gender equity.

Melanie has a J.D. from the University of Arizona, M.S.M.E. from the City University of New York, Brooklyn College, and a B.S.B.A. from the University of Arizona.



Brenda González
Director of Social Impact and Engagement at VPE Communications

Brenda González is a strategic communications and nonprofit capacity building consultant with a focus on organizations dedicated to social justice. She has over 15 years of experience working with community-based nonprofits focused on racial and economic inclusion and has worked in corporate social responsibility and community development.

She is an experienced public speaker and host who co-founded the Tamarindo Podcast, a podcast recognized by Oprah Magazine as a resource for learning about race in the United States.

Brenda's experience as a formerly undocumented student shaped her interests in politics and she taught American Government at Cal State Fullerton before she could

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vote. He has a bachelor's and master's degree in Political Science and has also lectured in Chicano Studies and Public Speaking. Originally from Puebla, Mexico, Brenda resides in Los Angeles with her husband Jeff Ricards and their dog Frida.



Dennis González
Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at Voto Latino

Dennis Gonzalez is the Vice President of Strategic Initiatives. He manages Voto Latino's leadership development initiatives and special projects. Before returning to VL, he served as the Senior Director of Leadership Programs at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI). He oversaw the NextGen High School immersion program, the Congressional Internship (CIP) and Fellowship programs. Before joining CHCI, he served as the Director of Partnerships at Voto Latino. Prior to his work in DC, Dennis worked with the GEAR UP program at the University of Texas San Antonio and in social justice and diversity education at the University of Texas at Austin. In California, Dennis worked with the GEAR UP program as well as in the College of Engineering at University of California, Davis.

He received Bachelor of Arts degrees in Chicana/o Studies and Political Science from the University of California, Davis and a master's degree in Mexican American Studies from San Jose State University. He has also served as a national officer for Gamma Zeta Alpha Latino-Interest Fraternity and the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO). Dennis is originally from Los Angeles, California and is of Salvadoran descent.



Carla Pierre Rynerson
Director of Government Affairs at The Raben Group

Carla P. Rynerson is a director in The Raben Group's Government Affairs practice, where she brings years of experience in advocacy, running issue campaigns, and coalition building to help her clients advance their policy priorities. At Raben, Carla advises nonprofit organizations and Fortune 500 companies on a variety of issues, including education, telecommunications, workforce development, and childcare, among others.

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Carla also serves as director of government affairs for Friends of the American Latino Museum, a nonprofit organization focused on the creation of a National Museum of the American Latino on the National Mall. She has played an instrumental role in the passage of the National Museum of the American Latino Act in 2020 and continues to lead the efforts to ensure the museum is built on the National Mall among the other iconic museums telling our nation's story.

Carla previously worked at the lobbying firm Capitol Counsel, where she supported legislative affairs for a range of clients, attended Congressional hearings, conducted research, drafted memos, and developed advocacy materials. Before that, she worked as a field organizer for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, where she recruited, trained, and managed 359 volunteers and interns on canvassing, phone banking, and data entry. In this capacity, Carla also collaborated with businesses and community groups to register new voters and build voter awareness, helping achieve a 5.5 percent increase in Democratic voter turnout.

As a junior in college, Carla was a legislative intern for Congressman Juan Vargas (D-Calif.), and it was during this time that she made the decision to move to Washington, D.C., to work on policy. Carla earned her bachelor's degree in International Studies from the University of California, Irvine. Carla was born in Mexico and came to the United States at the age of 13.



Zachary Quintero
Director of the National Hispanic Cultural Center in
Albuquerque

Zachary Quintero is from New Mexico and serves as the Director of the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Mr. Quintero was appointed to the position by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham in 2023. Before working as the Director of the center Mr. Quintero served in the executive branch of the New Mexico state government where he focused on healthcare, economic development, and public policy. Mr. Quintero holds a Juris Doctor Degree in Law and two other degrees in economics and government.

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Raymond Rodríguez
Communications Director for U.S. Representative Mike Levin for California's 49th Congressional District

Raymond Rodríguez is the Communications Director for U.S. Representative Mike Levin for California's 49th Congressional District. In this role, he serves as the chief spokesperson for Rep. Levin, and oversees all media relations and press strategies. Previously, Raymond served as the National Press Secretary for former House Democratic Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland, and Communications Director for Rep. Ritchie Torres of New York.

Raymond began his career as a paralegal for the Boston-based legal rights group GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) fighting for the right to same-sex marriage. After leaving GLAD, Raymond joined the political communications firm BerlinRosen in New York City where he advised political campaigns, nonprofits, law firms, and unions on media strategies to effectively use the press to advance public policy goals. In 2015, he joined NYC Council Member Ritchie Torres as his Deputy Chief of Staff overseeing communications and legislation. In 2020, Raymond worked on the successful Congressional campaign of Ritchie Torres that elected Mr. Torres as the first openly gay, Afro-Latino Member of Congress.

Raymond graduated from Dartmouth College with a degree in Sociology and Public Policy and was the first person in his family to graduate from college. He serves on the Board of the Alumni Association of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute where he helps young Hispanic Americans get their start in politics and government. Raymond was raised in Brooklyn, NY and completed high school in Miami, FL. He is a first-generation American and his parents are from the Dominican Republic and Honduras.



Robert Valencia
Public Affairs and Communications Strategist for Latino Engagement and Outreach at Earthjustice

Robert is the Public Affairs and Communications Strategist for Latino Engagement and Outreach at Earthjustice, one of the U.S.' largest and most important environmental law organizations. He acts as a liaison between the organization and the U.S. Latino media to inform about climate and clean energy news that impact the livelihood

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of Hispanics in the United States. Among his body of work, he helped drive communications efforts and conversations among legislation experts and partners that helped secure \$1 billion dollars in federal funding for Puerto Rico's widespread distribution of rooftop solar panels. Robert is a native of Bogotá, Colombia.

With over 15 years of experience in the field of strategic communications, journalism and public affairs, Robert has done research on topics related to cultural trends, immigration, government accountability, U.S.-Latin America relations, environmental justice and other issues. His reports and articles have been used or cited in college theses, books and peer-reviewed journals. Prior to Earthjustice, he worked with Washington, DC.-based think tanks the Center for American Progress and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and acted as a web strategist for Tides Center in New York. Additionally, he was selected as one of 26 professionals to participate in the 2016 National Urban Fellows program that awarded him a Master's of Public Administration from CUNY-Baruch College.

Thanks to his work experience, he has become a sought-after media commentator for Latin American audiences and beyond, with over 600 appearances on TV, print and radio outlets that include CNN en Español, Huffington Post Live, Voice of America, Al Jazeera English (and the now-defunct Al Jazeera America), Univision, Telemundo, and NTN24, among others. He broke several stories during his tenure as the deputy world editor at Newsweek, including newsmaking interviews with world leaders such as former president Vicente Fox and current president of Colombia Gustavo Petro.

Aside from his passion for rallying U.S. Hispanic audiences around environmental causes, Robert is an avid marathoner. He recently finished the 2023 Berlin Marathon and is training to run the New York and London World Majors. One day he hopes to run the streets of Valencia, Spain, considered the world's running capital.