

A VERY PERSONAL AMERICAN DREAM

In a season of highly divisive rhetoric, Roel Campos is contributing to Latino pride and helping to reunite Americans

BY JEFF SILVER

In a recent interview, Roel Campos was not happy. The latest news cycle contained another round of political rhetoric describing Latino immigrants as criminals “infesting” the country. Campos pointed out that there are about 47 million American Latino citizens today. The vast majority work hard and are law abiding. Importantly, Latinos spend about \$2 trillion a year and greatly boost the economy. “This rhetoric demonizes all Latinos and confuses the public,” he says. “It explains why bullying and hate crimes against Latinos are on the rise.”

So, Campos is committed to helping educate the public about the reality of the Latino community. “I believe that if the American public understands who we are and the contributions we have made to the nation, we will eventually become a more united and more prosperous country,” he says. This passion has led him to be a part of two organizations whose

missions include changing the perceptions and stereotypes of American Latinos: the Latino Donor Collaborative and Smithsonian Latino Center.

Campos was born and raised in a Mexican American working class family in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Campos spoke only Spanish and did not know a word of English when he started first grade. His father worked several jobs at all times to make ends meet. “My father taught me that hard work was essential and noble,” he says. When he was growing up in the 1960s, there were no local role models in business or the professions, and no mentors. “My parents were not educated,” he says, “and a Latino kid like me had to pursue his dreams mostly on his own—with intense focus and hard work.”

Campos attended the US Air Force Academy, earned an MBA at the University of California at Los Angeles, and served as an officer for five years. After



ROEL CAMPOS

PARTNER

HUGHES, HUBBARD AND REED



his military service, he graduated from Harvard Law School and later became a federal prosecutor in Los Angeles. At one point, he left law practice and joined a group of partners who operated a broadcast company that they later sold. Thereafter, Campos was recruited and appointed for two consecutive terms as the first Latino commissioner on the Securities and Exchange Commission under President George W. Bush. Campos received high marks for his work at the SEC and was viewed as bipartisan and creative in fashioning policy that both protected investors and enabled the financial industry to provide better services.

Campos is currently a partner at a major Wall Street law firm Hughes, Hubbard & Reed, where he is chair of the securities enforcement practice. Campos is also one of a handful of Latino partners in the United States to head a practice group at a major law firm. Campos is one of the best known lawyers in the country in his practice area of securities enforcement and regulation. He is proud to be with his law firm, which has a storied and distinguished past. Its founder Charles Evan Hughes almost defeated Woodrow Wilson for the presidency and later served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. “It is amazing to have as my partners some of the best lawyers in the country,” Campos says.

Campos believes that offering a constructive response is the best course for the negative political climate. “As a group, we support securing the borders, and we can have a constructive political dialogue without villainizing Latinos,” he says. That’s why he serves as one of the directors of the LDC.

Campos is also the chair of the board of advisers for the Smithsonian Latino Center. The board of advisers supports the Latino Center, which works collaboratively with the Smithsonian’s museums and research centers to help promote the hiring of Latino curators and to help develop the Latino perspective in arts, history, science, and national culture. As chair of the board of advisers, Campos is also excited to be leading fundraising efforts with fellow directors to help the Latino Center establish a venue in the future at the Smithsonian to tell the story of the American Latino.

Campos’s extensive and broad-ranging experience makes him a valuable asset to both LDC and the Smithsonian Latino Center. His legal, business, and governmental backgrounds give him unique insights

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into the intersection of governmental regulations and business and their impact on Latinos. He also knows how to deliver messages to corporate America that the bottom line will be improved by marketing to Latinos. Through experience and overcoming barriers, the bottom line for Campos is that America has become a culturally rich and prosperous society because it has been enriched by the contributions of people of all backgrounds.

However, he believes that his efforts are just the beginning. “There are many others who can accomplish great things in the same leadership roles that I have,” Campos says. “But I see this as my opportunity to help make progress in telling the complex story about who Latinos really are and to highlight the portions of our history that aren’t included in textbooks. I want to help make America feel united again.” 10