

NINA MOINI: Hispanic Heritage Month officially begins next Tuesday. Congress established the month in 1988 to celebrate Latino history, identity, and culture in the US. Since then, it's kicked off with an awards ceremony in Washington, DC. This year, the Hispanic Heritage Awards are leaving DC for the first time, and they're coming here, to Minneapolis, Minnesota. During tomorrow's ceremony at Orchestra Hall, the people of Minnesota will receive a Humanitarian Award.

Joining me now in studio is Hispanic Heritage Foundation President and CEO Jose Antonio Tijerino. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon, Antonio.

JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO: It is such a pleasure to be here, a complete privilege, and I can't wait to bring the Hispanic Heritage Awards to Minnesota. Specifically, we'll be in Minneapolis at Orchestra Hall.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. We're honored to have you. Thank you. Tell us a little bit about-- I understand you were here in May, back in May, and you had a meeting with some different community leaders here in Minnesota. What stood out to you as you've kind of built relationships with folks here in the state of Minnesota? Because you're based in DC.

JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO: Based in DC, but I feel like I'm joining a family asado every single time that I come to Minnesota. But I'm going to take you back, actually, to February, when we got a call from Henry Jimenez, who is local here and runs Propel Nonprofits, and he asked us to pull together a group of national Latino leaders and bring them to witness, to support, to learn from what was happening during the horrible-- the horrible escalation of deportations and harassment of people here in Minnesota.

So we made a trip, and Marla Bilonick and I gathered national Latino leaders. We had like 15 of them that joined us very last minute, and came here and met with groups like LEDC and CLUES and CENTRO, COPAL, Unidos, and it was a remarkable moment to meet and witness this great American story that was taking place of people protecting each other, of people coming across all different communities for each other. And we, at that moment said, we need to tell this story at the highest level. And so that's why we're here.

Then we came back in May, and that's where we put together a host committee of people from the area that were going to be our sherpas on the ground and give us guidance in terms of making sure that we do it right, with the right sensitivities. And also, we didn't just want to invite people that normally go to Orchestra Hall. We wanted to invite people that normally wouldn't go, our actual community that we serve, and not just the people that are serving them.

And so we just got done with an amazing event at CLUES, in terms of navigating your future for young people. They're all coming from this wonderful school, and so are the people that work there and their parents. We want to make sure that the actual award is going to the people of Minnesota. So that's our arc in terms of being here. And now, here we are, on your wonderful program, getting ready to kick things off tomorrow.

NINA MOINI: When the surge of federal agents were sent here earlier this year, the images that you are describing and the images that folks saw, for people living in Minnesota, I've often heard that they are interested in how what folks were seeing was perceived in other places from people who don't live here. And it sounds like you were very moved by what you saw, and were coming here and talking with folks and organizing. How are you feeling about what you witnessed here in Minnesota? Is part of the reason for being here trying to think about instances like this happening in other parts of the country or other cities?

JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO: Well, they had happened in other parts of the country. And I feel as though when they were happening here in Minnesota, that those were almost forgotten, and they shouldn't be forgotten. What happened in LA and in Chicago and in Charlotte, North Carolina, those should never be forgotten, and neither should what happened here, during Operation Surge in Minnesota.

So we wanted to make sure that we highlighted that story. But, it's not just the tragedy. It's also the triumphs that don't always get talked about. And we wanted to focus on this remarkable moment in American history, where communities came together and to showcase what America can possibly do. In this divided moment in our country, people came together in Minnesota, and I think it sets an example for what can happen. But I also think that it also sets an example for the next city that has to face this.

There are lessons to be learned from what happened here in terms of the resilience, the action, the rapid response, but as well as some of the infrastructure that was set up in a very short time, to combat the surge, but also to be able to move forward beyond it.

Because what you don't see in those clips are all the small businesses that were being threatened. You don't see the healthcare that wasn't being accessed. The mental health, the absolute trauma and PTSD, those aren't going to come across in those horrific images that we all reacted to.

And I've always said never want to go from feeling hopeless to feeling helpless. No one in Minnesota felt hopeless or helpless. There was something about the community coming together that made people feel as though there was always hope.

And the other thing I want to mention, too, that I noticed when I came here was almost this sense from people on the outside, after being here in February, that said, oh, well, they've drawn down. Everything must be OK.

Look at what happens after an earthquake. Just because the ground stops shaking doesn't mean everything's OK. Now, you have to build things back up. Now, you have to start the process of moving forward. And that's the arduous part. That's the part that takes a lot of the work.

So, they have not left here. And the images that are in people's minds, the trauma will never leave. So as far as I'm concerned, that impact is still happening every single day, but so is the great triumphs of the people of Minnesota, which is why we're here.

NINA MOINI: And that's why, to your point, it's important for people to come together from all these various cities you talked about and have these conversations. I do want to make sure we have just some time to talk about this event and this ceremony in itself.

Amazing past honorees. Los Tigres del Norte, you mentioned, are going to headline tomorrow's ceremonies. The list of people who have been honored before, amazing icons. Rita Moreno, Antonio Banderas, musicians like Bad Bunny. It's interesting to see all these different categories because, to your point, people from various parts of life and various industries can sometimes shine a light in different ways on what is happening.

So the Hispanic Heritage Foundation also gives out scholarships through the National Youth Awards each year. So you're continuing to build this network, it seems like. What are your hopes for this year's ceremonies, and how can people participate and watch the ceremony?

JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO: It'll be on PBS in October during Hispanic Heritage Month. But I want to highlight too, as you mentioned, who we're honoring. Even though Los Tigres are going to be headlining the performances, but Congressman Joaquin Castro, who is a real hero during these moments, and especially in Minnesota, he's going to be here. And he has a special connection, I think, to this great state.

Also, Mon Laferte, the great singer, who's getting it for human rights, for her work with women's groups and the LGBTQ community, and of course, the migrant community.

Oscar D'León, the legendary Venezuelan salsa singer and bassist. And then, for the young-- and Ximena Sariñana, who's a Mexican singer and actress. And then, of course, for the young people, Eladio Carrión will be here, and he will also be performing, who's a young Puerto Rican singer.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. Antonio, thank you very much for coming by the program. Congratulations, thanks for coming to Minnesota, and wishing you all the best with this year's ceremony. Thank you.

JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: Jose Antonio Tijerino is President and CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation.