

NLC Congress of Cities and Exposition

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ACCEPTANCE SPEECH OF NLC PRESIDENT

MARIE LOPEZ ROGERS

HELLO NLC FAMILY! Thank you so much. Where do I begin?

Let me start by telling you this story of a wise, old, woman her name - Maria Lina; she lived in the scorching desert of the southwest.

In the 1900s, Maria Lina and her husband were brought to Arizona from Mexico, to work as farm laborers for a company named the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. This company had purchased thousands of acres of land to grow cotton that was used in the production of tires.

Maria Lina lost her husband, Guillermo, at an early age. Back in those days, there was no such thing as OSHA or safety regulations.

Guillermo was trying to fix heavy equipment on a tractor when the engine fell and crushed him to death. They buried him in a dirt cemetery reserved for the hundreds of Mexican farm laborers who had toiled the fields and died – either as a result of accidents, disease, sheer exhaustion or war casualties, as many were veterans as well.

Maria Lina, now widowed, had to find a way to raise three children on her own. Fortunately for her, she was allowed to live at the Labor Camps.

In return, she took in laundry from the nearby Resort, where the executives from the Goodyear tire company stayed.

Year after year, Maria Lina washed the heavy white linens, sheets and towels from the Wigwam Resort, placing the laundry in a large tin tub over an open fire.

She would fill the tub with water and lye soap and stir and stir and stir, until the sheets were clean again, then hung to dry under the hot desert sun, where temperatures often soared to over 115 degrees.

Her children grew up working in the cotton farm fields, just as she and her late husband Guillermo had done.

Her oldest daughter, Oralía, managed to graduate from high school – what an honor! However, her fate was much like her mother's.

She married a handsome young farm laborer named Martin. Ironically, Martin also had lost his father, Severo, at the Goodyear Farms.

He was working in the fields late one night bringing irrigation water to the crops when a tractor ran over him in the dark and killed him. His final resting place was also in that dirt cemetery not far from Guillermo, Oralia's father.

Then along came Oralia's three children – three more new residents to the labor camps, three more able bodies to work in the farm fields as they grew older.

Maria Lina, older now and stricken with diabetes, wisely put the children to work on the task of stirring the laundry. And if they fought or argued without cooperating, she would take out her “chancla”!

She would make it a game – her grandchildren, stirring and stirring the heavy bedsheets and pillow cases in the hot water and lye, never quite realizing that they were doing an old woman's work.

When they were not helping their grandmother with the laundry, or housework, the children worked alongside their parents in the cotton fields, their hands scratched and bloodied from picking

the sharp cotton plants, the back of their necks burned from the searing summer heat.

Were their destinies to be defined by that of their parents, Oralia and Martin, and their parents before them, Maria Lina and Guillermo?

To answer that question, I am going to fast forward into the present, where Maria Lina's grandchild stands before you – awed, humbled, and inspired, by you;

An audience of elected officials, mayors, councilmembers, staff, and state leagues from all around this great nation, to accept your nomination for President of the National League of Cities.

Thank you—I am so honored, deeply, deeply honored and humbled to be your NLC President for 2013.

Your immediate Past President Ted Ellis has left me some BIG Chanclas to fill.

On behalf of the NLC Officers and the Board of Directors, and members, I would like to thank Ted, publicly, from the bottom

of my heart for his hard work and dedication to our NLC Family this past year.

Many of you may remember that Ted was elected to fill a vacancy for the First Vice President position, without having the opportunity to ease into the Officer role like most do as Second Vice President.

As President, he took the helm during some of the biggest changes in our organization's history.

In addition to the many pressing duties as NLC President, Ted has been steadfast in leading us through some tough budget challenges, and through the exhaustive search for a new director.

We really didn't know each other very well when we began to serve as NLC Officers, but my admiration, respect and appreciation for him has grown tremendously over this past year.

I really enjoy his folksy stories—which as you all know—are always profound. Thank you so much for your dedicated service, Ted!

Unlike Ted, I have had two full years as an NLC Officer in preparation for the big year ahead as your President.

For the past 16 years, I have been actively engaged in this great organization, whether it was taking LTI courses, serving on the Board of Directors, or as a Past President of WIMG & HELO.

As you can tell, NLC is near and dear to my heart. It has been my home, and you have been an extension of my family.

I believe I am the first Latina President in the history of the National League of Cities.

For those of you who know me, and understand our Hispanic culture, we just keep adding people in to our family, we truly believe that Mi Casa es Su Casa!

And as my grandmother & mother used to say, you don't want me to take off my chancla if you misbehave in this family!

Because just like every matriarch of our household, my first and foremost priority is to make sure that our NLC house is in order. And just like in every home, there are constant comings and goings.

Nothing ever stays the same. Don Borut is leaving us after two decades at NLC. Don, let me say, we've come a long way, baby! You have earned your retirement. May you and Carol enjoy your time with music, grandchildren and travel; a well-deserved retirement to enjoy life!

This is a bittersweet moment for me, because even as we say our farewell to Don, we embrace the future with new leadership at the helm.

Clarence Anthony welcome into your new role in our family! Your history, fresh perspective and energy comes at a crucial time for our organization. You bring new opportunities to our family.

Our cities and towns are coming out of a big recession. Our communities are not the same as they were twenty years ago, or even 5 years ago for that matter.

Expectations have changed, demands are greater, and we, as leaders, have to be ever flexible, more innovative and creative, and certainly, more empathetic and compassionate in our calling to serve.

Our residents expect more with funding at its critical moment. It is time to reset our visions, goals and expectations of municipal government. But as my mantra from a servant leader I was honored to meet, Cesar Chavez, Si Se Puede.....We can succeed, but we must do it together!

I can say with certainty that the spirit of my grandmother, Maria Lina, lives in me. And so does her chancla!

In times of adversity, she tackled problems head on. She persevered in order to keep her family whole. She was not afraid of hard work.

She continued stirring and stirring, and when her body became too frail to do it all by herself, she gently turned the wooden stick over to her grandchildren, to keep on stirring.

We are all in this together, my NLC family. We stir together!

I would like to take time to say thank you to every one of you that has been on this journey with me. To my wonderful husband of 43 years, the original Mr. Rogers....Ed; my three sons, of whom I could not be prouder; my six grandchildren, for whom the future never looked brighter; my fellow councilmembers who came all the way from Avondale to be here today—never was a council more united in serving its residents. Our staff who keeps our vision clear through their work, and of course, my Arizona League family.

Muchisimas gracias also to our NLC staff, the Board of Directors, and every single one of you who serve on a committee or council or in our constituent groups, or in some other capacity.

Never forget that your work has great impact on the lives of people across this country.

I would like to leave you with the words from a folk song from the 60s. I want you to think of that young girl in a farm labor camp in the middle of the desert, stirring laundry in a tin tub filled with soap and lye.

To everything - turn, turn, turn

There is a season - turn, turn, turn

And a time for every purpose under heaven

That little girl had yet to discover her purpose. I hope you have discovered yours ...

Thank you, and may God Bless our NLC Family.