



July 27, 2017

Dear Senator Hueso & Assembly Member Holden:

Thank you so much for raising the issue of Affirmative Action and the challenges faced by the poor and communities of color in California.

Your advocacy is brave – and timely. I wanted to respond to your thoughtful letter in kind, which is why I have considered my response for the last several days.

As you know, I have been a champion of Affirmative Action my entire career – starting with my work as the president of my local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. I not only fought for Affirmative Action, but I fought against attacks on immigrants, the poor and communities of color – opposing measures such as Propositions 187 and 209. I fought these battles because equal access, equal opportunity and social justice are the driving purpose of my life.

I, myself, am a beneficiary of an Affirmative Action program. I was a high-school dropout who was able to graduate thanks to the help of extraordinary teachers. I was a student at East Los Angeles College before I was accepted by the University of California, Los Angeles. That acceptance letter changed my life and launched my career in public service.

I have been able to live the California Dream because California invested in me. Every day of my career in public service, I have tried to remember my obligation to pay this debt forward so that others in this great state can enjoy the same opportunities – and second chances – that were offered to me.

That's why I fought so hard to dramatically expand health care for children when I served in the California State Assembly. That's why I worked to overhaul how we fund the renewal and rebuilding of our schools – so kids in poor communities could also attend safe and healthy schools. That's why I wrote and passed what was, at the time, the nation's toughest assault weapons ban – because it is in poor communities where the scourge of gun violence is most painfully felt. That's why, as Mayor, I took on the task of turning around failing schools in poor communities, which resulted in dramatically lower dropout rates and increased graduation rates.

Your letter to me and to my colleagues campaigning to be the next governor of California asks us to consider how we would promote the interests of communities of color and bolster Affirmative Action.



First and foremost, the best way we can promote everyone in California is to lift up the millions of Californians who are falling behind. California has more billionaires than any other country, except China and the United States, but we also have the highest poverty rate in the nation.

Perhaps you saw the most recent report – fully 38 percent of California families are just one lost paycheck away from economic despair. We are truly two Californias now – one rich, one poor. One state booming. One state falling behind.

My entire campaign for governor is dedicated to addressing this challenge. Closing the gap between rich and poor is simply THE challenge of our time.

It is also undeniable that there are racial and ethnic components to the wealth disparities we see in California. Unless we approach Affirmative Action by balancing both the ethnic and gender disparities with the tremendous disparities in wealth, we will not solve the underlying problems of inequality.

That's why we must continue the work of lifting up every public school – even when powerful groups oppose us. More than 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and 70 years after *Mendez v. Westminster*, which worked to end de jure segregation of Latino students in California, we simply can't tolerate separate and unequal public schools.

We must also dedicate ourselves to investing in rail, roads, water conservation and storage, clean energy, affordable housing and the other fundamental infrastructure improvements that help our economy grow high-wage jobs.

We must take a new look at Affirmative Action and rethink this successful 20th century program for the 21st century.

As I travel around California, it is clear to me that poverty, while certainly concentrated in some communities of color, is not unique to only communities of color. There are struggling families of every race – and in this emerging post-racial world, struggling families of mixed races.

Although we must continue to fight every day to create a more perfect union by addressing racially inequality, we must acknowledge that Affirmative Action must also work to address the inequities of gender and economics.

Our fundamental struggle is to close the gap between rich and poor and unite our state around the common purpose of lifting millions of families into the middle class.



The new needs-based Affirmative Action must lift up poor people of all colors.

We must bring back Affirmative Action, in a manner that specifically addresses the lack of female, African-American and Latino representation in our schools, universities and government while also focusing like a laser on economic disparity.

We have millions of families in California of all races and backgrounds doing everything right, but are still falling behind.

That's why we must act now so the California Dream stays alive.

Sincerely,

Antonio Villaraigosa  
Candidate for Governor