



2011-2012 President's Address
Benny Agosto, Jr.

HNBA 36th Annual Convention
Dallas, Texas
September 3, 2011

Wow! What a great Convention. We told you, everything is bigger in Texas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am so happy we are here in Texas. As the first Texas lawyer to become President of the HNBA, I could not be more proud and humbled by your support. Some of you may know this, it's a secret I keep close to my heart: I'm not really Mexican, I'm Puerto Rican. I may not be from Texas, but I got here as soon as I could. Now, I am proud to call Texas my home.

I want to thank so many people here tonight. Some traveled from Houston, Florida and even Puerto Rico. We are here because of those that came before us. We stand on the shoulders of giants. We are here, but for the Grace of God. I thank God for all my blessings. I stand here as a truly blessed man.

Before I go on, I want to thank the Board of Governors and the Texas team led by Judge Teresa Snelson and Christie Villarreal for all their hard work. Let's give them another round of applause.

I want to thank all our special guests, sponsors, family and friends for being here tonight. You honor us with your presence and support.

I want to thank some of the past leaders of the HNBA. Leaders like Ramona Romero, Judge Jimmie Reyna, and Roman Hernandez. It was leaders like them that inspired me to seek the position of HNBA President.

I want to especially thank my law firm, Abraham Watkins, the oldest plaintiffs firm in Houston, and my partners here tonight, Randy Sorrels and Daniel Horowitz, for their support and friendship. And my staff: Tina, Shari, Eloisa and Dan. I could not make it each day without them. Thank you.

Before we look forward to what we will do this year, I need to go back in time and tell you about my parents. My mom and dad are both from Puerto Rico. Neither of them went to school past the sixth grade. They both taught my brothers and sister the importance of having an education. They used to say, “no one can ever take that away from you.”

Don Beno, my dad, was a wonderful man. He was a great example to us all. One example of the man he was, was when he was 16 years old: he lied about his age and said he was 18 years old and joined the United States Army to fight in World War II. That is the kind of man he was. My mother, who is here with us tonight (I love you Mami), worked in the garment district in New York City as a seamstress. She is without a doubt the best mother and role model a child could ever have.

After the war, both my parents migrated to New York, where they met and started a family. I was born in New York and was raised in Puerto Rico. After high school, I came to Houston for college and played collegiate soccer.

Today, I can tell you that I am who I am because of my family. Let me introduce you to my beautiful family...[kids: Ben, Jon, Matthew & Victoria]

Last, but certainly not least, my lovely wife Nikki, my treasure, my love. Thank you for everything honey. I love you.

I have been given so much, so much love and so many blessings. That is why, ladies and gentlemen, I have to give back. I have no choice. So when I talk to you this evening about the Year of the Advocate, you will understand more about what makes me who I am and why I have so much passion for the things I do.

Did you know that there are over 50 million Hispanics living in the United States?

Did you know that of the 50 million, over 17 million Hispanics are under 18 years old? Latino children.

Did you know that overall, Hispanics accounted for more than half of the population growth in the United States over the last decade?

The question that we must ask ourselves is, what role are we going to play in order to make a difference, to make an impact in the Latino community?

If we work together, with one common goal, we will make a difference and advance the mission of the HNBA.

During the Year of the Advocate, the theme to my Presidency, the HNBA will advocate in 3 specific areas. The Profession. The Community. And the Children.

Often we talk about the good that lawyers do, the good that lawyers make possible, the injustices we expose, the feats we overcome, the agreements we shape, the laws we improve and clarify. But the most important thing we do is often overlooked. We are advocates for others, we speak for those who cannot speak, we stand for those who cannot stand.

During the Year of the Advocate I want to see our lawyers shine, as advocates speaking for those who cannot speak and standing for those who cannot stand.

First, we will be advocates for the profession by working hard to increase the number of Latino judges that are appointed, by continuing our efforts to increase the number of Latino federal appointments, and by increasing learning and training opportunities for lawyers, judges, and law students with free CLE programs and webinars.

Second, we will be advocates for the community by instituting the HNBA National Pro Bono Awards. These awards will honor those in our membership and corporate partners who dedicate their efforts to pro bono work and will create an opportunity for those efforts to be recognized.

Also, the HNBA will implement the HNBA Veterans Initiative. We should make it our priority at the HNBA to provide legal services to the young men and women that bravely serve our country. I cannot see a better way for the HNBA to give back to the community than through these initiatives.

Lastly, we will be advocates for the children in a number of ways. This year the HNBA will begin the Feed the Children Initiative, which is an opportunity for the HNBA to donate money to every city we travel in order to help Latino kids in those respective cities. Also, through more educational opportunities highlighted by La Promesa and Law Week activities. There will also be an increase in the number of Law Student programs and a stronger partnership with the HNBA Legal Education Fund to award a record number of scholarships and an increase in fundraising opportunities. This year for the first time, we plan to give close to \$100,000 in law student scholarships. The scholarships will be awarded to each Region and also through the Uvaldo Herrera Moot Court competition. We must focus on helping the next generation of Latino lawyers and Latino leaders.

We must stand together and be advocates. We must stand together for the profession, the community and the children. This must be our mandate because the future of the HNBA depends on it.

Tonight, I am going to ask you...Can I depend on you to partner up with us?

Tonight, in this hall I want us to resolve to be the HNBA not of repose, but the HNBA of action and reform. We will write not footnotes, but chapters in the HNBA story. We will leave this organization greater than we found it. To quote the great Texan Barbara Jordan, "when do any of us ever do enough?"

Let us not leave this beautiful gala without a job to do, without some goals to accomplish, to make the HNBA the organization we are all proud of. I am honored by the trust you have placed in me to lead the HNBA to even greater heights.

I believe in the HNBA. I believe in you. We all have been called to make a difference.

So as I close, I want to ask you....

Who will stand up with me to advocate for our judges?

Who has the courage to stand up with me to advocate for our fellow lawyers and judges?

For our law students and children?

For our community and veterans?

Who has the courage to stand up with me to advocate for our future?

Together, we can do it!

Together, we will make a difference!

Together, we will make the HNBA the best it can be!

From the bottom of my heart, thank you all very, very much.

God Bless all of you, God Bless Texas, and God Bless America!