

Transcription

California Community Colleges Podcast Episode 10 – Antonio Villaraigosa

Eloy: Hello, everyone, and welcome to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. My name is Eloy Ortiz Oakley and I have the pleasure of being Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. And, today, we have the great pleasure of talking with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Most recently served as mayor of Los Angeles and, now, is running for governor of the great state of California. And a great fact about the mayor, he is a product of the California Community Colleges so it's a pleasure to have you here with us, today, Mayor Villaraigosa. Welcome.

Antonio: Well, thank you for having me. And, you're right. I'm a proud Husky. I spent a year at East L.A. College. And it actually was a great transition for me, someone who was a high school dropout and went back. Graduated by going to night school, four nights a week but graduated with about a 1.4 grade point average. I went to East L.A. College and I was able to get about a 3.5 or so and give me the credits I need to go to UCLA the next year on the Affirmative Action Program so I've always acknowledged the role of a community college in transforming my life.

Eloy: That's really what the mission of the California Community Colleges is all about. Not only giving a great opportunity and a low-cost higher education to students and working-age adults who are ready. But, also, giving first, second, and third chances to anyone who wants to come and gain the benefits of a higher education. You've been not only mayor of Los Angeles, you've also been Speaker of the Assembly, involved in California politics for a long time. Given where you see California's at, today, given the income divide, given the challenges we face in the economy, what do you see is the most important role California Community Colleges could play if you were to become governor?

Antonio: Well, the master plan saw our community colleges as the workhorse of our higher education system and it still is. The student

body that's the most diverse in California that looks like our state, they're preparing people for the jobs of the 21st century, particularly the jobs that don't necessarily require a four-year college degree and so I think that enhance the career technical portion of that community college experience. You said it and I've said it many times, it gave me a shot at a great university, a UC campus -- UCLA.

I think we're going to also have to invest more in our community colleges but expect more, as well. We've got to graduate more of our kids with a two-year degree, with a work skill if you will, transfer more of them to four-year colleges. I know that some are opposed but I'm open to the notion of maybe granting baccalaureate degrees in our community colleges as well. I think community college is a great way to deal with the college affordability issue. I think we need to incentivize more of our high school students to take community college classes. And some of them but not enough of them are graduating with a high school degree and a two-year college degree. That takes two years off the cost of your college. I think more in the way of co-location with high school campuses, as well, is really important. And I intend to convene a broad stakeholder group of people who can share best practices -- what are the things we need to do to invest in our community colleges to get more out of those investments?

Eloy: That's great. And speaking of investments, you're familiar with the Public Policy Institute of California. PPIC recently did a survey of Californians, and one of the greatest angst that Californians have about higher education is this question of affordability. Most state residents, 56% of them, say, affordability is a big problem in California's public colleges and universities. And a large majority say that the price of college keeps students who are qualified and motivated from attending. Given this challenge and the fact that you have three large public systems of higher education -- the community colleges, the California State University system, and the University of California -- how would you address, as governor, this question and this concern about affordability?

Antonio: Well, I think we need to make it free for the people who can't...

Eloy: All right, you heard it here, first.

Antonio: ...for the people who can't afford it. As you know, about 60% of the people in the state can't afford it and they can aboard a governor waiver for tuition but they need more than that. They need book

assistance, they need some transportation, and support to subsist if you will. So I want to focus our scant resources on that and not make it free for everyone. Because I don't think we have the resources for that but I do believe one way to address college affordability is to put more of our high school kids into our community college campuses and address two years of college for free. I do think we need to look at, on a much broader scale, that people that are working in high-poverty areas, working in fields that require more in the way of skilled personnel...as an example, if you go to medical school and you go into an area of low-access to medical care, we ought to reward that and we ought to pay back the tuition. So I want to look at ways to make it more affordable by getting a double bottom line benefit if you will, graduating more people from STEM, at a time when we don't have enough people in the sciences, and math, and engineering -- and help pay some of their tuition at the end of the rainbow.

Eloy: One of the questions that we're raising in the California Community Colleges is the issue of affordability. Because most people feel that because tuition is so low and nearly a million or so students don't even pay tuition, that it's a low-cost education. But, indeed, the cost of living, the cost of transportation, the cost of books continues to saddle our students and keep them from completing in the numbers that they should. One of the great things we have in California is the Cal Grant system, which, I'm sure, you probably benefited from, as a student yourself. Do you have any thoughts about how we can continue to grow that Cal Grant system to serve more students? Particularly, as we face issues not only in the community colleges but all the systems -- with homelessness, food insecurity with our students? How would you target investments going forward to help more students, particularly those at the margins?

Antonio: Well, the people that I think we need to focus on to much greater degree. I don't have a funding source, at this moment, but I certainly will convene a broad cross-section of stakeholders and experts to look at how we can expand Cal Grants because I think we need to. And expand a threshold if you will, as well, not just for the very, very poor but for lower and middle-class people who really can't afford a UC and a CSU education. So I don't have the specific funding source for it but I am committed to expanding that pool. And I think those are investments that you get a double bottom line benefit from. And I think we've got to be open to investments like that, that pay dividends at the end of the rainbow.

Eloy: Right. Speaking of dividends, we have a population of students in California that been challenged quite a bit lately by the administration in D.C. And those are students who came to this country no choice of their own and who are in our colleges becoming doctors, lawyers, engineers, and they've been protected by DACA. What are your thoughts about this population of students? And, how do we convince not only our congressional delegation but policymakers in Washington D.C., about the importance of serving these students?

Antonio: Well, about 80% of America supports the Dreamers. They're getting an education, they're working, they're starting businesses, they're defending the nation. But I think, in California, we want to do more than that. There are people that don't qualify as Dreamers because they did come here older. And, I believe, when we educate people, we benefit from their skills and that education. They're contributing more to our security system and so I want to continue to expand and build on what we've done in the state. As I said, I believe that we ought to make it free for people that can't afford it. But, importantly, provide, as you say, the transportation, the cost of living, and some of the assistance that they need.

And then, how do we address this broken immigration system? I think, by charting our own path to the extent that we can. There's a lot of screaming going on and around immigration, right now. And, yet, both sides agree that it's broken. So let's fix a broken immigration system, give people a pathway to citizenship, let them get at the end of the line but have an opportunity to realize the American dream. And education is a key to that. We benefit.

If we were to deport the Dreamers, it'd be \$116 billion impact of California economy, alone -- Dreamers in California. It'd be a \$460 billion impact to the nation. If we were to deport their parents in the mass numbers that we hear talked about, that's more than a trillion dollar impact to the U.S. economy. You're talking about ag, hospitality, construction, the service industry -- all going to have a deleterious impact so I think we need to fix it. But, right now, the noise in D.C. is at a level that it's very difficult to do that, so the best thing we could do is chart a different path for the state to the extent that we can, under the law, and go forward.

Eloy: Well, that's what gives us a lot of pride, right now, to be Californians. Is, the state does seem to be trying to chart its own course. And, I think, as you mentioned, these individuals, whether documented

or undocumented, however they got here, are contributing to our communities. You're obviously very familiar with public education in California. As Speaker, you were a member of the Board of Regents, as well as CSU Trustees. And, as mayor, you were very engaged in K-12 education in the city of Los Angeles. Through those experiences, what have you learned about our system of public education? And as governor, how can you help us work more closely together to get better results for all Californians?

Antonio: It actually starts with my own life story. I went to Catholic school. My mother spent a little more on tuition and I worked my way through high school. I tell people that Catholic school gave me a foundation -- I was kicked out -- but a public school gave me a second chance. But when they did, they put a kid who went from a college prep education to basic reading classes, basic math classes, upholstery classes. They didn't have high expectations, so I dropped out. I went back to next year, as I said. Took classes four nights a week. That experience told me I had a great mom and a great teacher who did have high expectations for me and I turned my life around.

I think the next governor has got to realize that we've got to do a better job at turning the lives around, giving people a shot, giving them redemption. Not every kid that drops out, drops out because they're not interested. Sometimes, they're not challenged. And so when I became mayor, one out of three schools were failing -- 44% graduation rate. Only 89 of the 700+ schools were succeeding at 800-above. By the time I left, that 44% graduation rate went to 72%. Today, it's at 77%. One out of three schools failing went to one of 10 schools failing. The 89 successful schools went to 260 successful schools. So the next governor is going to have to make education a priority if we're going to grow our economy, if we're going to grow together, if we're going to address income inequality and poverty. If we're going to address the need for course correcting an economy that's not working for too many people. It's not just the poor, it's the middle-class, and the key to that is an education. So my life story, my experience as mayor and my commitment to giving voice to every Californian and to making sure that more people are making it in our state.

We have the sixth largest economy in the world, roughly the size of France, with the highest effective poverty rate in the United States, and a poverty rate comparable to Romania. We can do better than that. It's not just the poor. It's middle-class people working every single day and can't afford to rent a home, much less buy it. It's people who struggle

every day and are working and don't have a health care plan. Its folks who want to make sure that when they work hard and they play by the rules, they have a decent at the end of the rainbow. And, importantly, it's a generation that wants to make sure that their kids have a better life -- that's always been the social compact. And I think it starts with education and, importantly...particularly, in the new economy predicated on intellectual capital, it ends with education. It has a lot to do with why we have a prison pipeline that's bloated and a higher education pipeline that's empty. I want to redirect that prison pipeline to a pipeline of hope and opportunity and I think it starts with education, from early child education, universal preschool, full-day kindergarten. Expanding on LCFF -- the Local Control Funding Formula...currently, they're spreading it like peanut butter throughout the whole district instead of the money following the kids. We've got to focus on the kids with the highest needs and do a much better job at STEM education and the arts.

Eloy: Well, those are all important parts of the puzzle and, certainly, music to the ear of our listeners. So you spoke a lot about education as a key to the future. Recently, there was a survey done that suggests that a lot of people no longer believe in the importance of higher education -- particularly, Republicans and Independents: 59% of Californians say the effect is still positive but that 70% amongst Democrats, 54% of Independents say colleges and universities are having a positive effect but only 38% of Republican. So there's this trend, now, that suggests that, maybe, a higher education is not as valuable as we once thought. As governor, how would you reverse some of those perceptions, in California?

Antonio: I think we've got to do more with the money we've got. We've got to graduate more of our kids, give them the skills that they need to be successful. We've got to reward work if you will. I think the best way to change those perceptions is to, really, use data to make the case.

The fact of the matter is, more and more jobs require a college education. It's estimated we'll need 1.5 million college graduates by 2025. Another million of people with specialized skills. I'm not making that up. We need to tell that that story. And we need to map out where those kids are, that aren't graduating from high school, that don't have the skills they need to fill the skills gap. I think we've got to make college more affordable so people realize there is a dividend at the end of a...you know when you're a college graduate and you're working at a coffee shop, people get bitter about, not the coffee but the education

they got. And I think it's important that we grow our economy, grow more middle-class jobs so that people with those skills can actually fill those jobs.

And, really, make the case...people tell me, all the time, and you've heard me talk about career education downstairs in the California and Economic Summit, now, on your podcast. They'll tell me, "Not everybody's going to college." And I look at them straight in the eye and I say, "Do you say that to your kids? And if you don't say that to your kids, don't say that to mine." And, you know, the fact of the matter is, almost all of us want our kids to get an education or a skill. Not all of them are going to a four-year college or getting an advanced degree but they need skill. Otherwise, as the data, will show you, you're destined to make a million to \$1.5 less than a college graduate, \$2 million less than a person with an advanced degree, and a lot more than that with people with even more, in the way of a broad education. So use data to make the case, really sell the notion, make our schools more successful, address college affordability so people realize we don't know what all the new jobs are. We do know this, they need an education or a skill set to fill.

Eloy: Well, we certainly agree with you. Now, as we wrap up, I want to give you an opportunity. Is there anything that you would like to say to our listeners about, why, as governor, it would be important for our listeners to really think about voting for you? And what would that mean for public education in California?

Antonio: First of all, I want to thank you for asking me to come on your podcast. And, thank you for the work that you do heading up our community college system, sitting on the Board of Regents. I know what an education has done for you and, maybe, that's why you're so passionate about education and I know what it's done for me. I'm running for governor because I love this state. This state has given me more than I could have ever hoped for.

My Grandpa came, here, 100 years ago with a shirt on his back. He worked in the fields. Built a strong produce business that gave him a thriving middle-class life. In the 1930s, he lost all his money in the Depression, he lost his younger wife who left him. And when he had nothing, he put my mom and my aunt in a foster home but he visited them on the weekend. Put them in Catholic school.

I tell people, I'm standing, here, on the shoulders of the greatest

generation. A generation that gave me the shot, an opportunity to reach for the stars and follow my dreams. And I believe the next governor is going to have to do a much better job at restoring the luster of the California dream, ensuring that we're growing together, addressing an economy that's not working for too many people. It's not just the poor, it's the middle-class working every single day just to put food on their table, to pay their rent, to afford their health care, and to have a small pension at the end of the rainbow and a decent life. And I think the next governor is going to have to focus on growing our economy, growing middle-class jobs, as I said, starting with education and training people for the jobs of the 21st century.

I believe that in order to do things to say, people should look at your record. And I think, as mayor of Los Angeles, the largest city in the state, the second largest in the country -- I improved the graduation rate, crime went down 49% while I was mayor, number one American city to reduce carbon emissions, number five in the world made L.A. a clean tech capital of the United States. Built three light rail lines, one busway, built more schools, chaired every one of those bonds in any city in the country and we had the most overcrowded system. So I think record matters and leadership matters, and willingness to take on the tough issues. And I'm happy to be here with you and thank you for allowing me to be here.

Eloy: Well, we've been talking with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a candidate for governor of the state of California. It's been a pleasure having you, mayor. Thank you for being here.

Antonio: Thank you for having me.

Eloy: And you've been listening to California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. I'm Eloy Ortiz Oakley. Thanks for joining us. We'll see you again, soon.

Man: Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges Podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.