



## IRENE ORIA

### *HNBA National President*

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Querida Familia,

This coming year, HNBA/VIA is committed to “Looking Forward with 20/20 Vision.” Let me explain what that means.

First, it means that when we look around our country today, we can see that division, fear and hate of anyone that is “different,” are rampant. Certain members of our society see American’s diversity and see a threat. The best way to fight the forces of division, fear and hate is with unity, empathy and love. With 20/20 vision we can see that biases, prejudices, stereotypes are toxic; that they have set us back rather than advancing us; that they are not leading to the society that we want to be or the leadership we want to have for this country. The harsh reality is that sometimes we even see these forces rear their ugly head within our own community in Hispanics attacking other Hispanics. But, in order to fight our common enemies in the consequential 2020 election year ahead of us, we must come together as a Hispanic community. ***Our community stands strongest when it stands together!*** And so “Together We Rise” is the theme of our March 2020 HNBA/VIA Corporate Counsel Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Like the Phoenix, let’s work together to rise from the ashes after the periods of discord. Porque solo juntos nos levantamos!! Together we rise! And, keeping with the unity theme, “Stay Connected” is the theme for our September 2020 HNBA/VIA Annual Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Like the Minneapolis skyway system, the largest, contiguous system of enclosed, second level bridges in the world, that connects the city of Minneapolis, HNBA/VIA is going to build a Hispanic Skyway in Minneapolis in 2020 that unites all of us. No one will be left behind!

Second, as the National Voice of the Hispanic Legal community and the 58 million Hispanics in the U.S., we will continue to press changing the narrative to a positive, inspiring one that lifts all Hispanics up. We have so many positive things about our upbringing such as strong work ethic, emphasis on education, and the focus on family and religious and moral values, all of which we share. These values have served us well. In 2020, we will shout from the rooftops how successful Hispanics have been in this country when they have been given a seat at the table, the positive impact we have had on the economy for a long time now, and the enormous impact by all accounts that we will have on the 2020 Election.

***Bottom line: that which unites us as Hispanics, as Americans, and as lawyers is far greater than that which divides us.*** Uniting our community and changing the narrative about our community to a positive one will surely help us with our diversity and inclusion efforts because we will be better

able to engage and advance all Hispanic lawyers, judges, law students and other legal professionals, regardless of what country or countries their family derives from, their political ideology, what city they call home, what schools they graduated from, or their particular socio-economic circumstances.

Third, and very important in an election year, we must have our collective voices heard on the issues affecting our community, through our Hispanic vote. All of the HNBA's advocacy in 2020 will be non-partisan and issue-focused without regard to parties or specific candidates or campaigns. Again, we must come together as a community leaving no one behind. That's the only way to ensure that everyone in our community is truly represented. In partnership with the ABA and our sister bar organizations, we will protect our voting rights as Hispanics, register voters, work the polls and the legal phone banks, basically do everything we can do as lawyers to deploy our knowledge and skills, including our Spanish-speaking skills, to promote full access to participation in the 2020 Election cycle and otherwise ensure the integrity and security of the Election. We are forming a Special Committee on 2020 Election Initiatives to inform and coordinate our non-partisan election-related efforts with a view towards continuing to provide thought leadership on Hispanic voting rights issues and continuing to develop our members' expertise and leadership in this field at the national, state and local levels. Our 2020 Election initiatives will include participation in major voting rights litigation; advocacy in support of the Voting Rights Advancement Act and similar initiatives at the state level; collaboration with the national non-partisan Election Protection coalition to advance and defend the voting rights of Hispanics; HNBA member participation as poll workers and in poll closing observations and voter registration drives; assistance with naturalization applications; education of our community about the importance of census participation to prevent Hispanic voting rights from being diluted in the next redistricting cycle; participation in census litigation; and promotion of Hispanics into careers as Secretaries of State (the chief election officials in each state) and local election officials.

Fourth, leaving no one behind in 2020 means that HNBA/VIA will continue to award scholarships to law students throughout the country that they can use towards their legal studies at accredited U.S. law schools. We are also launching a Hispanic law clerk initiative to increase the number of Hispanic law students applying for and securing state and federal judicial clerkships and we are appointing a Law School Liaison to develop and strengthen HNBA/VIA's relationships with Hispanic Law Student Organizations and their Law School Faculty Advisors.

Fifth, leaving no one behind in 2020 also means that HNBA/VIA will turn its focus on two specific groups of Hispanic lawyers that we are not engaging as much as we should, although not for lack of trying – our solo/small firm practitioners and our government and non-profit/public interest lawyers. Together, these two groups represent over 75% of the Hispanic lawyers in the U.S., yet they do not participate in our conferences or our other HNBA/VIA initiatives in large numbers. We are not having a significant impact on our Hispanic legal community, we are not moving the needle, unless we hone in specifically on these lawyers to determine why we are not engaging them in considerable numbers and to give them the targeted training they need to advance their careers, especially since so many of these lawyers stay with their solo/small firm practices or in the government/non-profit sector for the entirety of their careers.

HNBA/VIA has a number of robust programming initiatives that we will, of course, continue to improve upon in 2019-2020 and which are geared primarily towards advancing the careers of our in-house and large and mid-size law firm attorneys. In contrast, our programming and initiatives geared specifically to advancing Hispanic solo/small firms and government and non-profit lawyers is limited. To fill this gap, during our Annual Convention in 2020, we will be launching the

HNBA/VIA Solo/Small Firm Boot Camp that will teach hard and soft skills to existing solo/small firm practitioners as well as those interested in starting their own firms. The goal is to help them with every aspect of creating and maintaining sustainable solo/small firm practices. As for our government and non-profit/public interest lawyers, among other things, we will update our 2011 study on the status of Hispanic lawyers in this sector and consider ways to address the barriers to advancement. The Special Committee will also investigate why the HNBA is not engaging more of these lawyers and recommend steps that the HNBA can take to increase their engagement. And with the support of our corporate partner for Latina Commission programming, Walmart, we will also roll out Latina Executive Academy programming that specifically targets high-performing Latina government and non-profit lawyers that have at least 8 years of practice, with a view towards taking their careers to the next level.

One can say that in making our government and public interest lawyers a priority in 2020, we are going back to our roots since it was civil rights lawyers that initially founded the HNBA back in 1972 during a time in our nation's history when discrimination and prejudice against the Hispanic community abounded. Unfortunately, we are living through some trying times again, and so it is fitting to turn our focus this coming year to the government and public interest lawyers that are most frequently on the frontline addressing the legal issues impacting our community.

And these are just some of our HNBA/VIA goals for what promises to be a very busy and challenging year both for our profession and for our Hispanic community at large. Stay tuned to learn more including how you can get involved! I trust that all of you will heed the call for unity and action and stand with us in fighting for our community in such an important year in our nation's history! Please know that whatever stage you may be at in your career (law student, young lawyer, seasoned lawyer), whatever your practice (litigation, transactional, compliance, privacy, intellectual property, etc.), whatever your employer (solo, Biglaw, corporate legal department, government including military and judicial, NGO, etc.), or whatever your role if you do not practice law (business side, legal recruiting, D&I, etc.), whatever city you hail from, whatever your circumstances may be, there is a special place at the table just for you at HNBA/VIA this year. We're making a concerted effort to have something for everyone, so please join us!

Plus, you definitely do not want to miss HNBA/VIA's milestone celebrations in 2020, including our celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual HNBA/VIA Uvaldo Herrera Moot Court Competition and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment that gave women the right to vote.

On behalf of our Board of Governors and staff, thank you for believing so strongly in the HNBA/VIA mission and the work we carry out to advance Hispanics in the legal profession and an America that is great precisely because it is diverse – a nation that undeniably would not be as great as it is were it not for the contributions of immigrant families like ours. And, on a more personal note, thank you all for believing in me! I am honored and humbled to have been entrusted to lead this organization that has been by my side at every turn in my career beginning with my law school days in the late 1990's. *¡Gracias por el voto de confianza!*

With great humility and unwavering commitment,



Irene Oria