

June 23, 2015

Mr. Ricardo Salinas
c/o Latinos and Society Program
The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, Ste. 700
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. Salinas,

I am writing to thank you for extending your generous scholarship in order to attend the Latinos and Society program "A Fresh Look at the El Paso del Norte and the U.S.-Mexico Border region" this past June 7th through 10th.

Prior to going on this rigorously researched and well-organized tour of meetings with stakeholders from the El Paso, Texas, New Mexico and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico region, known as the Borderplex, I had no idea of the cultural, economic and geographic strengths of this part of the country.

The opportunity to meet with representatives of industry, nonprofit organizations, K-12 and higher education bodies, as well as municipal leaders, was extremely beneficial to my personal and professional understanding of how issues of race, class, immigration and assimilation occur within this specific region. And how this is similar to and far different from other border towns in the United States.

As a prolific chronicler of both immigration issues and the experience of Hispanics in the U.S., the knowledge I gained and the contacts I made on this trip will pay off for decades to come, I'm sure. I am very grateful to have gotten the opportunity to participate.

Programs such as Latinos and Society are invaluable to journalists who, like me, are essentially freelancers or for other reasons do not have the budgetary support from our publications to engage in national on-the-ground reporting or professional development.

Please count on me to lend whatever assistance, support and/or endorsement I can provide to ensure that programs such as Latinos and Society can continue to thrive.

With much thankfulness,



Esther J. Cepeda
Nationally Syndicated Opinion Columnist, The Washington Post Writers Group