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## **Senator Rodríguez to receive MALDEF's highest honor**

**El Paso** - Texas State Sen. José Rodríguez will receive the Valerie Kantor Award for Extraordinary Achievement at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)'s annual gala in San Antonio this Friday.

Sen. Rodríguez will enter his fourth legislative session representing Texas Senate District 29 in the Texas Senate in January 2017. In his first three sessions, Rodríguez has championed the needs of everyday Texans, working across party platforms to develop, pass, and amend legislation. He has secured funding for local priorities; passed more than 150 bills that support education, health care, sustainable energy, equality, economic development, veterans, and criminal justice reform; and served as an effective leader who relentlessly advocates for the people of Senate District 29 and Texas.

The Valerie Kantor Award for Extraordinary Achievement, the highest honor given by MALDEF, is named for the former MALDEF board member, who served from 1974 until her death in a plane crash in 1978. It is given to former MALDEF board members who have distinguished themselves for their contributions to the group and the Latino community.

"It is a privilege representing the people of District 29 in the Texas State Senate, and it is a privilege to have served the public virtually my entire career, from working for Housing and Urban Development in D.C., making sure farmworkers had access to legal services through Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, to serving as El Paso County Attorney, the elected position I held for 17 years before being elected to the Texas Senate in 2010," Rodríguez said. "I have always endeavored to be a strong, effective voice for my community, and now more than ever, we need leaders and a government that works to ensure that the opportunities our great state and nation offer are accessible to all. This recognition by MALDEF is a humbling reminder that we have made progress, but our work must continue."

Founded in 1968, MALDEF is the nation's leading Latino legal civil rights organization. Often described as the "law firm of the Latino community," MALDEF promotes social change through advocacy, communications, community education, and litigation in the areas of education, employment, immigrant rights, and political access.

“Sen. Rodríguez has made truly exemplary contributions to El Paso and the entire state of Texas, but his influence and leadership have been national in scope,” stated Thomas A. Saenz, MALDEF President and General Counsel. “MALDEF has been privileged to work with such a paragon of political service as a member of our board of directors for many years, and we are proud to honor him with the Valerie Kantor Award, the highest honor that MALDEF bestows.”

Rodríguez was elected to the Texas Senate in November 2010, after serving as the El Paso County Attorney for 17 years. As a freshman legislator in 2011, he passed 41 bills related to education, health care, economic development, renewable energy, public safety and the courts, ethics and government transparency, and the military.

During the 2013 legislative session, the Senator continued this remarkable record of achievement. He passed 50 bills and two concurrent resolutions into law. The bills included local priorities with statewide impact — including the transformation of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso from a branch of the Lubbock-based health sciences center to an independent, standalone university component of the Texas Tech University System — as well as a series of reform bills to address cheating and accountability in standardized testing.

Rodríguez built on this record during the 2015 legislative session when he passed 71 bills and concurrent resolutions dealing with education, health care, economic development, veterans, and criminal justice reform; 66 of which became law. Notably, he helped secure funding for Senate District 29 priority items, including \$3.5 million for the long-awaited Franklin Mountain State Park Visitors Center; \$70 million in tuition revenue bonds for an interdisciplinary research facility and \$7 million for the pharmacy program at the University of Texas at El Paso; \$75.52 million in tuition revenue bonds for the Medical Science Building 2 at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center-El Paso; and \$30 million for Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grants for military cities.

A former migrant farm worker, Rodríguez understands that education and equal opportunity are the keys to individual and community success. He has fought for better funding for our schools, to improve access to health care for millions of uninsured Texans, and for workers' basic rights, including rest breaks and recovery of unpaid wages.

Rodríguez has worked with colleagues over several sessions to stop anti-immigrant proposals, such as forcing local police into federal immigration enforcement roles; eliminating the ability of Texas DREAMERS, college-age state residents brought here as unauthorized immigrant children, to attend university and pay the same tuition as other Texas residents; and flooding border communities with expensive and unnecessary expansion of DPS troopers on the basis of ill-defined "border security." In addition, he fought against efforts to draw electoral lines that diluted minority voting strength, and he has defended equal rights for women, minorities and the LGBTQ community.

His remarkable ability to work across party lines and his tenacity on the Senate floor have gained him numerous accolades, including being named "Freshman MVP" by Capitol Inside, "Legislative Hero" by Texas Access to Justice Foundation, "Best of Senate" by the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas, "Advocate of the Year, Elected Official" by the Texas Association for Education of Young Children, "Texas Women's Health Champion" by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "Champion of Equality" by Equality Texas, "Legislator of the Year" by the Family Law Foundation, "Senate Legislator of the Year" by Texas Nurse Practitioners, and the "2015 TABE Joe J. Bernal Community Service Honoree" by the Texas Association for Bilingual Education.

Most recently, he was elected Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus. Prior to assuming this position, he served as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Hispanic Caucus for nearly two years. In

addition, Rodríguez is a Presidential Appointee to the 10-person Board of Directors of the Border Environment Cooperation Commission-North American Development Bank (BECC-NADB); a long-serving member of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) Board of Directors; and the current Chairman of the Border Legislative Conference (BLC), which is a joint program of the Council of State Governments (CSG) West and its regional partner in the South, the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC), and comprised of legislators from the 10 American and Mexican states bordering the U.S.-Mexico border.

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*José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.*