Good afternoon.

My name is Tony Hernández Pumarejo, and thank you for tuning in to a new episode of the podcast for our autism community.

And today I have the honor and privilege of interviewing Congressman Henry Cuellar of the 28th Congressional District of the United States, representing the 28th District of the State of Texas.

We’re going to provide a brief introduction of our special guest.
of the United States for the State of Texas
in the House of Representatives.

Originally from the state of Texas,
he was born the son of immigrant
farm workers in Laredo, Texas,
and grew up with his seven siblings.

Congressman Cuellar
is passionate about education. He has
an associate degree from
Laredo Community College and
master's degrees from Georgetown University
and Texas A&M International University.

He also has a degree in law
and a Ph.D.

from the University of Texas,
Houston, which makes him
the member of Congress
with the most post-secondary degrees.

Congressman Cuellar
has worked as an educator,
lawyer and the owner of small businesses,

in addition to his positions in the state and federal governments.

Cuellar was elected to Congress for the first time in 2005, and is now serving his 10th term.

The Congressman holds important leadership positions, including as the senior member of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States.

And also, and this is very important, he is Co-Chair of the Congressional Autism Caucus.

When he’s not in Washington D.C.,
Representative Cuellar resides in Laredo with his wife and two daughters.

So it's an honor and a privilege of a lifetime to have Congressman Henry Cuellar with us today.

Representative, thank you for being with us today on this episode of Hablemos Autismo.

Thank you very much, and it's a pleasure to be here with you and talk about a topic that is very important to families anywhere in the United States when talking about autism.

Thank you, Representative.
Before moving on to the topic of legislative initiatives,

we'd like to give our audience that's listening the chance to learn a little bit more about you.

And I wanted to ask, before moving on to analyze these efforts in Congress, if can you tell us a bit about yourself.

Before entering Congress,

what inspired you to run for an elected office?

REP. HENRY CUELLAR
Well, first of all, my parents were immigrants.

They only knew a few words in English.

Everything in Spanish.

They didn't attend school for more
than one or three years,

because in those days children were taken out to work in the fields.

The more hands working, more money for the family.

And my parents didn't have many years of education.

They worked hard,

and later they had a family.

I'm the oldest of eight children.

It's important to point out that my parents didn't have money, because they were immigrant workers,

but they were rich in love,
And they taught me two things:

the importance of education

and how to work hard
to achieve your goals.

The importance of education
was very important,
because they never had the opportunity
to go to a high school or college.

I'm the first in my family
to go to a college.

And that's why the goals are important that parents
give to us, their children.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO

Excellent.

Your story, Representative Cuellar,
is the American dream.

Your parents emigrated to this beautiful country that you and I and many of us love.

This story of working, and expecting nothing,

sacrificing oneself to get ahead,

which is the dream that, especially in this Hispanic community,

we identify with, which is the American dream.

It is the American dream, as you say, correct.

They had no money,

but they worked hard,

and gave us the opportunity to go to school.

And as my mom and dad said:
Work hard,
get a good education,

and you’ll be good members
of this society.

Thank you very much,
Representative Cuellar,

for having shared
this story of your family
and of how you were able
to move forward

at that time
to fulfill your dreams.

And as we mentioned,
you were elected to the 28th district.

Tell us a little bit about your district
and the constituents you represent.

REP. HENRY CUELLAR
Well, when I finished
my law degree,

I began my career
as a lawyer,

a small merchant,

and I also taught at a school, at Obrero School,

and at the university, here in Laredo,

the TAMIU.

I worked as a lawyer,

and I decided to run for state representative.

I spent 14 years as a state representative,

and there are two things I did that are important to me

because it's what I learned from my parents.

I started the largest scholarship in the history

of the State of Texas, called the Texas Grant,
in which, if a person has no money and wants to go to college, they will.

And this is important, because my parents had no money for us to go to college.

And the other thing was that I started the first pilot program of children's insurance, the CHIP Program, at the Farias Elementary school in Laredo.

Those are two things I did, because afterwards I was Secretary of State of Texas, and my State career started.

I went to the US Congress, and now I'm on the Appropriations Committee.
I'm the only Democrat in Texas who's on this Committee.

This is important because we can put dollars in areas where they can have a positive impact on the growth of families.

So, whether in the State or Congress, I've had the opportunity to work with many people who want to improve the communities we have, especially the families that need some kind of assistance.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO

Excellent.

Throughout your career there are different initiatives
that you've worked on for your population and for everyone,

and obviously for the whole country, for our entire nation,

and along these lines, Representative,

we saw that you started working on initiatives for autism.

I wanted to ask you and was wondering about this question:

What inspired you to get involved in legislative initiatives for autism?

REP. HENRY CUellar
I represent one area of San Antonio,

a large, urban part,

Laredo, Texas, here on the border,

and rural parts,
also at the border,

00:08:53,440 --> 00:08:58,320
and everywhere
there are families with whom I've spoken.

00:08:58,760 --> 00:09:01,600
They tell me, "hey, I have a son or daughter

00:09:02,000 --> 00:09:04,600
who has autism, and I need help."

00:09:05,240 --> 00:09:08,000
Often there are small communities

00:09:08,000 --> 00:09:11,120
that don't have resources,

00:09:11,120 --> 00:09:14,880
and during times like
the pandemic,

00:09:15,400 --> 00:09:20,520
it was very difficult because the children
weren't going to school and were at home,

00:09:21,000 --> 00:09:26,040
and for families who have
a son or daughter with autism, it

00:09:26,120 --> 00:09:29,440
was very difficult for them.

00:09:29,440 --> 00:09:33,280
The service that schools sometimes
provide wasn't available.
And that's why I decided to focus on helping families who need it, with autism.

When I was with my friend and neighbor, Chris Smith of New Jersey, at the Capitol,

I said to him: "Let's work together, Republican and Democrat,

to find ways to support autism."

He asked me if I wanted to be his Co-Chair in the Autism Caucus.

I gladly accepted, and now we're working to make changes to the law,
and I'm working, in my committee, to provide funds and resources to try and help these families with autism.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO
And about the Congressional Autism Caucus,

please explain in greater detail what is the purpose of this Autism Caucus.

And what it means for you to be the leader of this caucus and of these initiatives for autism.

REP. HENRY CUellar
It's important to note that, in Congress, we have to deal with many matters.

Border security issues, issues of nations that are not great friends with us.
We’re talking about China, Russia, North Korea, Iran and others.

Many subjects related to different things, but family issues are something very important, and the Caucus provides the opportunity to educate my colleagues.

Because, as I say, we have a lot of work to do as congressmen in Washington regarding many issues, and the Caucus helps us to focus on a subject we can’t forget, which is the autism that we find in some families.
That's why the Caucus for me is important, putting the focus on educating colleagues, giving the opportunity to families who come to Washington to talk with members so we can learn about their needs, and not only the needs of these people, but also the aid that parents sometimes need, or the caregiver, and what we can do to train a parent, if there is a young parent who has a child with autism. As a young parent,
how are they going to help their child?

00:12:36,400 --> 00:12:38,880
And so there are many ways in which the Caucus can help us.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO
00:12:44,120 --> 00:12:47,480
As part of this community,

00:12:47,880 --> 00:12:51,200
I’d like to thank you and the Caucus for the work you’re doing,

00:12:51,880 --> 00:12:54,680
for this cause that not only has an impact on

00:12:56,040 --> 00:12:58,200
part of the population,

00:12:58,200 --> 00:13:03,280
but on everyone as a society,

00:13:03,480 --> 00:13:04,990
because autism rates continue to grow every year,

00:13:06,920 --> 00:13:11,040
and this will require more effort by our elected representatives

00:13:12,480 --> 00:13:16,200
to help families impacted by autism.

00:13:16,200 --> 00:13:18,720
And along this line, Representative Cuellar,
Let's talk a little bit, let's go back to your district, to the city of Laredo.

As you know, the city of Laredo, your district, is now one of 16 sites in the United States designated at the federal level to monitor the prevalence of autism.

This means that, as well as helping to estimate the number of people who are diagnosed with autism, there will be more local data available on autism in the state of Texas, and South Texas specifically.
Why do you think that having this information will be useful for improving the results of people and families impacted by autism?

REP. HENRY CUELLAR
I remember when we announced this last year,
I think there were 2.4 million dollars for Laredo to conduct these new studies, and I remember seeing friends who didn't know their children had autism.
I learned a lot, just watching who was in the audience there at City Hall.
I as a congressman, both you and we know that, with autism,
it doesn’t matter if you come from a family

with or without money,

we can see this in different families.

For the CDC, it’s important to see this kind of information,

especially in areas such as the border,

and sometimes when they talk about the border, they talk about the immigration issue,

but Laredo, if you look at the numbers of the US Centers,

is the city with the highest percentage of Hispanic people nationwide, given that 96%

of the people living in Laredo are Hispanic, and speak Spanish.
There are some French people, but they speak English and Spanish.

00:15:40,800 --> 00:15:44,200
That’s why it’s no longer just the big cities.

00:15:44,520 --> 00:15:47,120
It’s no longer just New York, it’s no longer just Miami...

00:15:47,880 --> 00:15:51,440
We need to have this kind of information for the CDC

00:15:52,080 --> 00:15:56,478
in all parts of the nation

00:15:56,871 --> 00:15:59,480
to get the right information

00:15:59,800 --> 00:16:04,920
and take steps to improve these lives.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO
00:16:05,920 --> 00:16:08,000
It’s interesting that you, Representative,

00:16:08,040 --> 00:16:10,520
share this detail about the city of Laredo

00:16:11,120 --> 00:16:14,480
and its importance in our nation

00:16:15,240 --> 00:16:20,360
and about the opportunities to work here in terms of services
and support for our Hispanic families impacted by autism.

And I thank you very much for sharing this detail.

And along these lines, Representative,

let's talk a little bit about the work in Congress about the disparities in autism services. The access to health services and necessary support vary significantly within the autism population.

A recent study shows that Hispanic children with autism are at higher risk of having poor health outcomes.

Yet, for Latinos or Hispanics with autism, and their families, often the challenges
to access the services are greater for a variety of reasons.

For example, another study found that autistic Hispanics had access to far fewer resources than their Anglo-Saxon or white counterparts.

In fact, that study showed that the Rio Grande area, in Roma, in your district, had ten times fewer resources for autistic children than what was typical at the national level.

We know that you assumed this leadership role to help close some of these gaps, so my question is:

What can Congress do
to improve the results for autistic people and their families,

particularly Latino individuals and families?

And my other question is: can you tell us about some of these initiatives that you're working on as Co-Chair of the Autism Caucus in Congress?

REP. HENRY CUellar
Well, first, when there's a problem, we need data, facts, to understand what steps we need to take to find a practical solution.

One such data, as you said, is that the Hispanic community
is growing very, very rapidly.

For example, in the state of Texas, in the last two Censuses of 2010 and 2020, the fastest growing sector here in Texas was that of Hispanics. And among Hispanics, we see that the money families make is lower than in other areas. It’s a young population because we’re growing very rapidly. And that’s why knowing these data is important for knowing where to put the money.
In Congress, on the Committee, for example,

there's a program, and we allocate money,

and we expect this money to reach the areas that need it.

That’s why, as you just now said, sometimes Hispanics

or, as in the studies you indicated,

sometimes it can be seen that the resources don't reach them; the aid doesn't arrive.

Especially what we're seeing right now,

the growth of Hispanics, no longer just domestic

i.e. those who were born here,

but we're getting people from Central America and Honduras, Guatemala

and other areas, and this community is growing faster.
Knowing the data, where to put the resources, is very important, and that's something I hope to work on with you, and work on with the Caucus, to see where we must put the resources.

You know, right now, some colleagues want to cut back 130 billion dollars,

but there are some areas where, in my opinion,

we must not cut back: areas of aid for families,

so they can grow stronger, and helping children is very important for our future,
not only for the families, but for the future of the United States.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO

Excellent.

We're very grateful to you and your team,

and to the Caucus, in terms of working on these much-needed initiatives,

because, to repeat, not only do they have an impact on one segment of the population,

but rather impact our entire society, our entire country.

And that's why it's very important to provide those resources, those funds,

and that aid, to support, through more programs,

families that live with autism every day.

And before concluding this interview, and once again, Congressman Cuellar,
thank you for being with us in this episode of my podcast,

I wanted to ask you what message you’d like to share with Hispanic families who are watching this podcast right now and who have loved ones with autism, about the work that you and the Autism Caucus in Congress are doing,

and how your efforts can help on behalf of the autism community.

The major changes that I’ve seen as a congressman are not my ideas: they're just ideas we get from the community.

Hey, Congressman,
have you thought about doing this?
Hey, Congressman,

did you know that we have this problem?

Do you know that I'm a young parent,

and I have a child with autism?

We need good training.

Schools need this kind of help
to help these children.

The importance of the community

in talking to a congressman
is very important.

And I implore,

if they have ideas,
they must communicate them
to my office or their congressman.

00:22:43,640 --> 00:22:46,400
We, the Caucus,

00:22:46,920 --> 00:22:49,680
are going to help as much as possible.

00:22:50,160 --> 00:22:55,160
The Hispanic Caucus, who are congressmen from different areas,

00:22:55,160 --> 00:23:00,440
are also going to push to help, especially Hispanics.

00:23:00,440 --> 00:23:04,680
There are different ways, but the important point is you.

00:23:05,400 --> 00:23:09,720
Your voice is very important, and therefore

00:23:09,720 --> 00:23:14,040
I'm asking you to contact me,

00:23:14,040 --> 00:23:18,880
or to contact your congressman.

00:23:18,880 --> 00:23:24,920
We want to hear your voice in order to improve

00:23:25,440 --> 00:23:27,520
the autism services
for your children or your family.

**TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO**

Excellent.

Thank you again on behalf of our autism community.

We’d like to thank you for your leadership, with Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, and the entire Autism Caucus.

And it’s so great that we’re talking about this subject, especially when this episode is being transmitted during Hispanic Heritage Month, especially that within the Hispanic community.

we talk about autism and, more importantly, that our autism community is informed
about the initiatives that Congress is working on.

I appeal to all the families tuning in to this podcast to take a more active role in advocating and in fighting for services and support in order to provide a better quality of life for our loved ones, who've been diagnosed with autism.

Congressman Henry Cuellar, it has been an honor and the privilege of my life to have you on my podcast, Hablemos Autismo.

This is your home. You're always welcome to come
another time, and again,

00:24:48,240 --> 00:24:51,880
thank you for your participation
in this special episode of the podcast,

00:24:51,880 --> 00:24:52,880
Hablemos Autismo.

REPRESENTATIVE HENRY CUELLAR
00:24:54,360 --> 00:24:55,760
Thank you very much,

00:24:55,760 --> 00:25:00,160
and thank you very much
for being the voice of these families,

00:25:00,160 --> 00:25:04,320
who sometimes don’t want to talk or
believe they can’t talk.

00:25:04,680 --> 00:25:08,080
You’re letting their voices be heard
on the podcast,

00:25:08,640 --> 00:25:11,640
Hablemos Autismo.
Thank you very much.

TONY HERNANDEZ PUMAREJO
00:25:12,360 --> 00:25:13,320
Thank you, Representative Cuellar.