

THE PROGRESSIVE FORUM®

Great Minds, Great Answers®

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Anthony Romero, Executive Director of ACLU at The Progressive Forum November 6

The Progressive Forum Reopens After Hiatus of Three-and-a-half Years



The leader of the nation's premiere defender of civil liberties, Anthony Romero will appear at The Progressive Forum on Monday, November 6, at 7:30 p.m. Romero has served as executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for 16 years. He is the first Latino and openly gay person to serve in this position. Romero will sign books and greet fans at the end of the evening.

The venue is Congregation Emanu El at 1500 Sunset Blvd. across the street from Rice University. Capacity is 850 seats, a large but intimate environment where all seats are close to the speaker podium. There is free parking on the campus.

The associate presenter is the ACLU of Texas which is headquartered in Houston. Its executive director, Terri Burke, will introduce Anthony Romero.

There are three levels of ticket prices: \$40 for students and seniors 65 and over, and \$70. Both levels are for general admission, open seating. \$150 tickets include a reception with the speaker and reserved seats. Tickets are available at ProgressiveForumHouston.org or at 888-695-0888 seven days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

The Progressive Forum served the community for nine years as the city's largest speaker organization averaging a thousand people per event. It's the nation's only lecture series expressly dedicated to progressive values whose past speakers included Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Jane Goodall, Robert Redford, and many more. It is returning after a hiatus of three-and-a-half years, with plans for two to three events a year.

Randall Morton, Progressive Forum president, said, "In this dangerous time of a Trump Presidency, I believe we need this community asset more than ever. And personally, I missed the intellectual engagement, sharing common values with kindred spirits.

"Romero and the ACLU are a timely fit," Morton continued. "The ACLU is leading the resistance on issues we feel acutely here in Houston, the abuse of immigrants, voting rights, LGBT rights, press freedoms, and more. For example, Romero and the ACLU achieved a first legal victory by winning a nationwide stay of Trump's Muslim travel ban just 24 hours after it was issued."

Time magazine named Romero among the 25 most influential Hispanics in America. He has led the most successful growth in ACLU history, enabling him to expand the ACLU's national litigation, lobbying, and public education efforts. Since the Trump election, membership has more than doubled to 1.5 million. Born in New York City, Romero was the first in his family to graduate from high school. He is a graduate of Stanford Law School and Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy and International Affairs. He is co-author of *In Defense of Our America: The Fight for Civil Liberties in the Age of Terror* (2007).

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Romero took the helm of the ACLU just seven days before the September 11, 2001 attacks. Anticipating the impending assault on civil liberties in the name of protecting national security, Romero quickly launched the Keep America Safe and Free campaign to protect basic freedoms. He created the ACLU's National Security Project, which achieved legal victories on the Patriot Act, uncovering thousands of pages of documents detailing the torture and abuse of detainees in U.S. custody, filing the first successful legal challenge to the Bush administration's illegal NSA spying program. During the Obama administration, the ACLU continued its litigation on NSA surveillance and launched litigation and advocacy around the U.S. drone program.

Prior to Trump's election, the ACLU released a legal analysis warning that Trump's proposals would amount to a "one-man constitutional crisis." According to ACLU materials, Anthony Romero oversaw the creation of the ACLU's first national grassroots mobilization effort. People Power was launched in March 2017 through town hall meetings with over 2,000 in-person attendees and was live-streamed to more than 2,300 house parties, watched by over 200,000 people in all 50 states. The purpose was to galvanize grassroots power to new levels of activism to fight an unconstitutional federal crackdown on sanctuary cities as well as seed mobilizers at town halls and state legislatures to hold public officials more accountable.

Terri Burke, who will introduce Romero, has served the ACLU of Texas since 2008. She has led the organization through a strategic focus on LGBT rights, criminal law reform, religious liberty, immigrant rights, and reproductive rights. Under her leadership, the organization relocated its headquarters to Houston, and expanded its statewide reach by opening offices in Dallas, Brownsville, Austin, and El Paso. She increased staff from eight to close to 40 and membership rolls fivefold.

During Ms. Burke's tenure, the Texas organization brought lawsuits against federal immigration agencies to curb excessive force and family detention; expanded awareness and implementation of LGBT equality through active support of local non-discrimination ordinances and campaigns like Houston Unites; diminished the school-to-prison pipeline through advocacy with local school boards in Houston, Dallas, and Austin; and raised awareness of private prison abuse, solitary confinement and criminal justice abuses through publication of widely cited reports.

Prior to joining the ACLU of Texas, Burke had a 32-year career as a journalist. Her career includes stints as senior editor at *The Dallas Morning News*, *Austin American-Statesman*, and *Albuquerque Tribune* before becoming editor in chief of the *Abilene Reporter-News* in Texas.

The Progressive Forum premiered in June 2005 with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Mayor Bill White in a program called "Our Environmental Challenges," becoming America's only civic speaker organization expressly dedicated to progressive values.

The history of The Progressive Forum includes a number of other milestones. The Progressive Forum produced national book launches for Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, climatologist James Hansen's *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's *My Beloved World*, as well as the autobiography of Lester Brown, *Breaking New Ground*. The Progressive Forum provided the film premiere of *Fighting Goliath: Texas Coal Wars*, introduced by Robert Redford who commissioned and narrated the documentary. Gloria Steinem celebrated the 30th anniversary of the historic National Women's Conference held in Houston in 1977. From government, The Progressive Forum presented U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and two Supreme Court Justices, John Paul Stevens as well as Sonia Sotomayor.

The Progressive Forum is also the first city-based speaker organization featuring comprehensive website pages of past speakers, reaching a worldwide audience. These pages are in-depth and comprehensive with event video, biographical sketches, reading lists, and related links. The videos are longer than common internet fare, but broken down into segments and short clips. The website is intended to serve as a source of inspiration for scholars and seekers, a source of perpetual enrichment.

In April of 2014, The Progressive Forum closed with an event featuring environmental activist, Bill McKibben, cofounder of 350.org whose mission is to build a global grassroots movement to solve the climate crisis. In those first nine years, the Forum produced 48 events.

A full list of past speakers includes Michelle Alexander, Karen Armstrong, Lester Brown, Ken Burns, Gail Collins, Richard Dawkins, Jared Diamond, Sylvia Earle, Elizabeth Edwards, Tim Flannery, Jane Goodall, Al Gore, Brian Greene, James Hansen, Seymour Hersh, Arianna Huffington, Molly Ivins, Garrison Keillor, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Joe Klein, George Lakoff, Richard Leakey, Rachel Maddow, William McDonough, Bill McKibben, Bill Moyers, Nancy Pelosi, T. Boone Pickens, Michael Pollan, Robert Redford, Frank Rich, Ken Robinson, Eric Schlosser, Anna Deavere Smith, George Soros, Sonia Sotomayor, Gloria Steinem, John Paul Stevens, Alice Waters, Larry Wilmore, and Edward O. Wilson.

The mission of The Progressive Forum is to serve as a civic speaker organization dedicated to enriching our democracy and culture by presenting the great minds we believe are advancing the success of the individual, our species, and life on the planet, great minds from all the fields of human endeavor, from the sciences and humanities as well as politics and public affairs. Our progressive viewpoint is rooted in mainstream constitutional, enlightenment, and egalitarian values that need continual affirmation.

Founder and president, Randall R. Morton, operated Randall Morton International, Inc. for over 32 years, an advertising and public relations agency whose clients included leading oil equipment companies in the U.S., Japan, Mexico, and Europe. He was a member of the board and management committee of the predecessor to Grant Prideco, the largest manufacturer of drill pipe, later absorbed by National Oilwell Varco. Morton co-created and co-hosted the Oilfield Breakfast Forum from 1994 to 2003, another speaker series which is still the largest in the oil industry. He earned a B.A. degree in government from Georgetown University where he attained a national ranking of three as a pass receiver in non-scholarship football. While at Georgetown, he served as an issue writer for the Democratic National Committee. Later, he earned a second B.A. in communications from Tulsa University, serving the following year as adjunct professor teaching advertising design and copy. He is the father of two grown children.