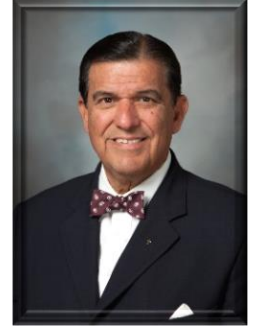




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## **Juneteenth, A Reminder that Progress for Racial Minorities Requires Unwavering, Continued Growth**

*Commentary by Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville), author of the Advisory Council on Cultural Affairs, SB 459*

This year as our nation finds itself at a crossroads, the meaning of Juneteenth has taken on an even more profound meaning. Recent events have reminded us that true progress has yet to be achieved for racial and ethnic minorities and, in order to provide justice for all, we must not only reckon with our nation's past, we must also do more. We must atone for the injustices that racial and ethnic minorities are experiencing today.

Although great strides have been taken in Texas, Juneteenth requires our state to do much more. In 2017, I co-authored Senate Bill 1849, the Sandra Bland Act, which among other matters, requires law enforcement to complete training in de-escalating confrontations as part of their basic training and continuing education. All of us can agree that preventing traffic stops from escalating is something that we should always strive for, but our state need not stop there. Much more needs to be done in advancing the interest of racial and ethnic minorities in Texas.

For this reason I recently wrote to my good friend Aaron Demerson, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Cultural Affairs, who is strategically situated to help further the cause and build on recent efforts to address the needs of racial minorities in our state.

In 2015, I authored Senate Bill 459 to establish the Advisory Council to advise the governor's office on the needs of our growing racial minority population. At the time, community leaders in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties and I believed our constituency would be greatly served by having the Council advise the governor's office on setting policy priorities that address, and raise public awareness of, major issues related to our emerging Hispanic population and other matters resulting from changes in demographics in Texas. Today, as our state is going through unprecedented times, now -- more than ever -- racial and ethnic minorities would be greatly served with tangible action to assist their socio-economic advancement. That is why I respectfully asked Chairman Demerson to maximize the use of the Advisory Council as a catalyst of positive change to help guide Texas to profoundly improve the quality of lives of millions of racial minorities across our state.

Being a graduate from Texas A&M Kingsville, Chairman Demerson has seen the challenges that minorities in South Texas face. Living in an economically distressed region makes the possibilities for socio-economic advancements for our constituents much more difficult to achieve. This is among the reasons why, during my tenure in the Texas Senate, I have fought to pass reforms aimed at increasing the opportunities for improvement and growth for my constituents. From improving their ability to become homeowners, to strengthening the possibility of seeking a medical education in the Valley, to increasing the resources to have clean, safe drinking water, to establishing pathways to pursue a career in the Aerospace Industry, avenues for improving the quality of life of my constituents have been successfully established. This is why I am honored to have successfully passed SB 459 into law.

It is my legislative intent for the Advisory Council to encourage and support the continued, and consistent, progress of racial minorities in our state. The Advisory Council could greatly assist racial minorities by recommending innovative, deliberate, and profound initiatives that foster and engender the growth and socio-economic advancement of minorities in Texas. With the Advisory Council's help, minorities can achieve meaningful positive change in the economy and the workforce, in their academic achievement, as well as in civic and political leadership.

This Juneteenth, I stand with racial minorities across our state with a will and energy to ensure their continued growth and unwavering progress. With the moral urgency to address the unfinished socio-economic advancement of racial and ethnic minorities, I look forward to working with the Advisory Council in developing robust recommendations for the upcoming 2021 Legislative Session. Rest assured that we can wholeheartedly meet the legislative intent of SB 459 and be the critical impetus to strengthen Texas' effort in profoundly improving the socio-economic standing of racial minorities in our state. The challenge is ours to take.

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*Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D – Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.*