

Advocate for Immigrants

SALMA HAYEK PINAULT RECEIVES HONORS FROM THE CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS INSTITUTE AND REFLECTS ON DIVERSITY IN DC AND BEYOND.

BY LESLIE QUANDER WOOLDRIDGE

Salma Hayek Pinault is known for being smart, funny, lovely, and—as she has been for many years—focused. This fall she left her home in France for a stop in Washington, where she accepted the Medallion of Excellence from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. The institute awards this, its highest honor, to Latinos who have had career success while serving as “positive role models” and empowering Latino youth. And so the spotlight was not on her black Balenciaga dress—though stunning—but on her dedication to setting this example and her hopes for our country.

With the DREAM Act—which seeks to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented youth—in the news this fall, Hayek Pinault had much to say. “What is important is not to change one thing, but to [look at] the concept of immigration in a different way,” she told *Capitol File* before the ceremony. “If I could change one thing, it’s for people not to look at us as if we come to this country to take—because we have come to this country and have built this country in many ways.”

Hayek Pinault speaks from experience. Born in the oil town of Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz, Mexico, she blossomed into a soap opera star before leaving for America in the early ’90s. At first rejected in Hollywood for her heritage and lilting accent, she took on bit roles before getting her big break with Antonio Banderas in 1995’s *Desperado*. Avoiding stereotypical parts, she scored a leading role in 1997’s *Fools Rush In*. Chasing her dream to produce a movie about legendary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, Hayek Pinault went on to co-produce and star in 2002’s *Frida*—which earned six Oscar nominations, including a best actress nod.

Hayek Pinault has succeeded in creating opportunities for Latinos—she was also executive producer of television’s award-winning *Ugly Betty*—and she’s taken personal time to advocate for women and girls. After learning that a friend was being beaten by her husband, Hayek Pinault even



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continues to make her home with her husband, French businessman François-Henri Pinault, and daughter, Valentina, and pursues her interests in American immigration and the success of Latinos in America.

As Hayek Pinault notes, Latinos who are immigrants fight for the nation as members of the US military and are integral members of society. And as the nation’s largest so-called “minority group,” Latinos are among the fastest-growing populations in the country, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of US Census Bureau data. “America’s diversity is a source of strength,” Hayek Pinault said from the ceremony’s stage, the Medallion of Excellence resting around her neck. “And we need to show everyone that our vast, vibrant culture will only enhance and enrich this great nation.” **CF**



ABOVE: Salma Hayek Pinault spoke at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute’s awards gala in October. LEFT: She joins Frida Giannini and Beyoncé Knowles at a Chime for Change benefit.

testified before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary about violence against women, and she spoke against extreme violence in the border town of Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. Earlier this year, she became a founding committee member of Chime for Change, a global campaign to empower women and girls. Now, after recently wrapping *Everly*, a thriller due out in 2014, she continues to make her home with her husband, French businessman François-Henri Pinault, and daughter, Valentina, and pursues her interests in American immigration and the success of Latinos in America.

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