Thank you Dean Deolalikar for that warm introduction and good evening Highlanders!

I want to recognize Senator Roth for his incredible representation in Riverside. His leadership to secure $15 million for startup and program costs for the UCR School of Medicine is unmatched.

Tonight, I am honored to join you in launching California’s newest graduate program in public policy here at UC Riverside.

It’s appropriate that this school is launching in one of the fastest growing regions in the state – at the epicenter of Inland Southern California.

This region’s trends, opportunities and undoubtedly, its challenges, are a preview of what’s to come in other parts of California and around the world.

We live in the most creative and innovative state in the world. California is the 8th largest economy and we compete not with other states – but rather – with other countries.

That’s why people come from all over the world in search of real opportunity with hopes of achieving a better life.

First, second, and third generation Americans contribute to the greatness of our state as do New Americans who enter this country looking to contribute to the economic, political and cultural fabric of California.

As I reflect on this region, it is hard not to think of my mother.

I was raised by a single mother with a third grade education. She immigrated to California to give my sisters and me a better life.

I grew up in Barrio Logan in San Diego – a community 90 miles southwest of Riverside – full of hard working and proud people, but sadly an industrial dumping ground with more than its share of poverty, pollution, drugs and gang violence.

My mom took the bus every day to the homes with ocean views on the top of the hill.
• Her days spent taking care of the elderly and cleaning houses of wealthy families. She worked tirelessly to put food on the table and clothes on our backs.

• And yes, I rose out of poverty thanks to a courageous mother and teachers who believed in me so that I could get a college education.

• But sadly, millions of kids today won’t have the same opportunities I had and that you have before you.

• This disparity has led me to one very important conclusion: isn’t it time we shatter the great American myth that we can simply “pull ourselves up by the bootstraps?”

• It’s a fantasy – simply not true because we all need help. Every single one of us – whether rich or poor, white, black, brown or Asian, young or old, Riverside’s Eastside or Beverly Hills – is relying on someone to achieve our individual ideas of success.

• And let me be clear – reliance is nothing to be ashamed of.

• Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, Chavez, King, and Milk – are all great giants, great leaders that each attributed their success to people who have helped them along the way.

• Yes, hard work is paramount to success.

• But no matter how hard some people work, because of their lack of access to resources and education or their social economic class, they are relegated to live differently. They are relegated to live with less.

• The crucial element of success is in community — how we relate to one another and support each other, how we build a society that allows for upward mobility — irrespective of who you are, which language you speak, the hue of your skin or your legal status.

• We are at our best when we elevate each other, rather than drag each other down.

• We are at our best when we help those who are less fortunate or those who are at a disadvantage.

• We have no choice if we wish to maintain and improve on the economic security of the 8th largest economy in the world.

• Tomas Rivera, a trailblazer who became the first Chicano Chancellor in the University of California system with his selection to lead UCR in 1979, called this “Civic Morality.”

• He said: “Civic Morality gives clarity of action” and that “it is only through this type of correct action that one can hope to build a better community. Ni más, ni menos.”

• Not more…not less.
Rivera reminds us that our education combined with positions of influence, demands that we see ourselves as morally bound to serve our community.

That we think in the “We” as oppose to the “I”.

And, he tells us that we must consistently and thoughtfully cultivate an engagement and understanding with the community as a catalyst for real change.

Because at our core, we are all connected. We are Californians – we are the Golden State.

We innovate, we lead, and we invest in the most valuable capital we have – our people.

But make no mistake, there are challenges - very real policy challenges that policy makers, business, community advocates and scholars must address.

  - Public policy matters.

We are experiencing an unprecedented drought that threatens to cripple our agricultural industry and our food security — and disproportionately impacts access to water for underserved communities.

Too many of our kids lack green parks to play in, clean water to drink and clean air to breathe.

Climate change remains a real problem that we must address.

With the current visit of the Holy See, Pope Francis, we know that the existential threat before us is climate change.

We recently passed SB 350 to build on California’s progress in cleaning up our air and reducing our contributions to climate change so that we can leave a healthy and livable planet to future generations.

By 2030, 50% of our electricity will come from renewable sources, and our buildings will double their energy efficiency relative to today.

And while we were unsuccessful in achieving a formal goal of reducing petroleum consumption by half, we have still laid a powerful groundwork for a clean energy future.

SB 350 makes it a core mission of utilities to electrify our transportation sector, paving the way for the end of our fossil fuel dependence.

These new targets will create incentives to invest in technologies and infrastructure that create a sustainable future for our communities and expand the market for clean-energy industries.
And although we may have elected officials in the area who still are not convinced of climate change — even with a depressed economy and some of the worst air quality in nation — with or without them, we will build a new economy of tomorrow that will put people to work, lower utility bills and gas prices and free our children from the asthma that chokes their lungs.

Healthcare is another pressing challenge for California.

Too many in our state still lack affordable health care, particularly if they were born out of country.

This year, I’m proud that through Senate leadership, we secured $40 million to cover all California kids, regardless of where they were born.

This is a major victory but adults are still not covered so we continue pushing for Health for All.

And, with regard to immigration, California is leading by example, with compassion and with acceptance.

We are showing the rest of the country that our immigrants are a valuable economic driver. They are a rich part of the fabric of our society.

We aspire to integrate, not isolate.

This is just scratching the surface. The challenges facing our state in the 21st Century are very real and pressing.

However, I’m proud to say that the California State Senate is the national laboratory for R&D.

- Vaccinations
- Death with Dignity
- Climate Change
- Wage Theft
- Pay Equity
- Sexual Assaults on college campuses

Now this is where you all come in – the future problem solvers, policy makers, non-profit executives, analysts, educators, public servants and professors of California.

You have the privilege of pursuing a Master’s degree in Public Policy at the Riverside campus of the University of California – the greatest public university system in the world.

With this opportunity comes the great obligation that you extend a hand to those who cannot pull themselves up by their boot straps.
• As you advance in public policy careers, you must do so with an eye toward civic morality that focuses on equitable solutions to the problems our society faces – with a focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us.

• We can’t wait for other states or even our federal government to act.

• On the contrary, they look to us. And in just a few years, we will be looking to you.

• As we wrestle with 21st Century challenges such as climate change, quality education and access to health care, it is important that the next generation of policy leaders develop powerful new ideas that provide imaginative, innovative solutions.

• So I challenge each of you to tackle your research with a passionate lens.

• Work in your community, with elected officials, with non-profits to use this journey to make a real impact on improving the quality of life for all residents of Inland Southern California, our state, country, and indeed, our world.

• Congratulations Highlanders!