

INTERVIEW OF DELIA GARCIA BY FRANCES JACKSON, April 21, 2022
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, INC.

Frances Jackson: Today is April 21, 2022. I am Frances Jackson, and with me is the former Representative David Heinemann who is our videographer. We are located at the Dr. Ronald W. Walters Library in Wichita, Kansas, and we're here so that we can conduct an interview with Delia Garcia to help us understand and to keep for reference many of the things that you've been able to do over the past few years. And it's for the Kansas Oral History Project.¹

This collection will be examining the diversity of voices active in public policymaking and in the last of the 20th and the first [decades] of the 21st centuries. It's in these interviews that we want to learn about policy development through the eyes of those people who are directly involved. So today while I interview you, we'll be looking at some of those things that you had direct contact with and what it meant to you and to your community at that time. So what is one thing that people need to know about you before we get started really?

Delia Garcia: Thank you, Fran. It's exciting to be a part of this project. I think the most important thing is that I'm born and raised a Kansan, and my entire family is here. I grew up in Kansas's oldest family-owned Mexican restaurant since 1963.

FJ: Really? I need to know that.

DG: Connie's Mexican Cafe.

FJ: That is great. So what is your educational and community or your professional background?

DG: I attended high school here in Wichita at Bishop Carroll Catholic High School. My undergrad was at Wichita State University, and my master's degree in political science was at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas.

FJ: San Antonio. We have something in common. My sister was there a long time.

DG: Yes? I love it.

FJ: Then what happened to you after you left San Antonio?

DG: Literally in my last semester pursuing my master's degree, I get a magical phone call, April 27th to be exact, 2004, and they were like, "Hey, Delia, what are you doing?" I'm like, "I'm studying for my finals." They said, just small talk, they were like, "Well, there's an open seat, and your family's restaurant is in the heart of it." I had worked on Governor Sebelius's campaign previous and all these other campaigns. They were like, "You know what you're doing. It just makes sense. Come back home and run."

¹ The Kansas Oral History Project is a not-for-profit corporation created to collect oral histories of Kansans who were involved in shaping and implementing public policy. Recordings and transcripts of these oral history interviews are available to researchers, educators, and other members of the public through the Kansas State Historical Society and the State Library of Kansas and on our website, <https://ksoralhistory.org>. Funding for the project is provided by volunteers, individual donors, and Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization connecting communities with history, traditions, and ideas to strengthen civic life. <https://kansashumanities.org>

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And I said, "Heck no." At the time, I was twenty-six years old. I'm a statistic, unfortunately. Women have to be asked multiple times to run or consider running for political office.

FJ: Oh, I like that fact.

DG: Yes. So I was definitely a statistic, and I said no five times.

FJ: Five times.

DG: So April, I said no. May, I said no. But some little birdie friends in Wichita knew I was coming home for Mother's Day that May of 2004. They were like, "Hey, she's coming in. Let's have one more talk with her face to face." And the face-to-face meeting we had at the headquarters on Waco Street, they were like, "What's the hold-up?" I said, "Well, first of all, I don't think anybody would vote for me."

FJ: You did say that.

DG: I thought I was too young. I was twenty-six. I had actually just turned twenty-seven. No Latina woman had ever been elected. I didn't think they would vote for a Latina. Being a Democrat, I didn't think—

FJ: There would be enough votes.

DG: I didn't know. So long story short, I prayed about it. I talked to my family. With their support, I decided to run. One thing was in the way, not in the way, but it was a consideration I had to make, a decision. I was in my last semester to graduate.

FJ: Yes.

DG: I was supposed to graduate in August, and it was going to be hard to go back to finish. So I was not going to run if my professors said I couldn't finish. The dean said, "Have at it. You just worked for a senator," Leticia Van de Putte, one of my mentors. She was one of the first Texas Latinas who was elected to the Senate. I worked on her campaign that spring of 2004. I asked her advice. She said, "Look, I'm not going to tell you to do it or not do it, but this is what you should consider." So I had talked to her. So when the dean said, "No, you're going to go to Kansas, and you're going to run," and I was like, "What about my second-to-last class as an internship?" He said, "I'm going to let you use your campaign this summer as your internship." He said, "You can get an A or an F."

Needless to say, August 2004, I got an A. I graduated with my master's, and I won the primary. I didn't have an opponent. So, yes, August 2004 was a pretty exciting month for me.

FJ: And for the state because when you won that election, what were you thinking about how you might be received in the legislature?

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DG: You know, that ran across my mind every night. I have to say I didn't know what to expect, and I was constantly talking with mentors, "What should I expect?" Also, thinking about what laws and policies should I put forward because this is a huge responsibility. And also the responsibility of now making history as the first Latina woman being elected to the Kansas legislature. It took 142 years.

FJ: Say that again. It took how long?

DG: A hundred and forty-two years for the first Latina to be elected to the Kansas legislature. So that was in 2004. I knew with that was an honor and a responsibility.

FJ: Yes.

DG: So I made sure I was intentional in getting media training. I thought I could figure out all this stuff ahead of time, but I really had some amazing people.

FJ: Helpers.

DG: Who really mentored me and ushered me and would pull me aside and say this. I have to say it was amazing. It was both sides of the aisle who did that. I will always treasure that and those friendships I still hold today.

FJ: How intriguing.

DG: So very exciting.

FJ: Very exciting. So you arrive in Topeka, and you attend that first day. What were your expectations or your feelings or whatever?

DG: It was every emotion you could think of in one body and mind. I remember very distinctly, this is January 10, 2005.

FJ: 2005.

DG: And my family—also note that they said, "You can only have two tickets to have somebody in the audience."

FJ: And you have all of this family.

DG: I have a huge family. So I remember in December leading up to the January swearing-in, I was like, hustling. "Hey, can you give me more tickets?" I get ten tickets. So ten of my family members are up in the gallery. I told them, "Please don't embarrass. Make sure you follow the roles up there."

FJ: "Don't holler out my name too many times."

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DG: So they swear us in by fives, and they come to the “And the Honorable Delia Garcia, 103rd District,” and my family’s like, “Woo-hoo, Delia!” I’m like, “Oh, my god. My family is so Mexican.”

But at that moment, I walk to the aisle to go to the front of the Chamber, and I just remember, it was like the movies. Everything got quiet. I was so excited. My heart was beating. I couldn’t hear anything. I knew at that moment in my time, I was exactly where I was supposed to be, and everything was about to unfold, and it did. When I walked out of the Chambers, when I got my first interview, television interview, and thankfully I had had some media training the month before because the gentleman says to me, “Congratulations, Representative Garcia. You must be so excited. Tell us, how intimidated are you?” and he throws the microphone at my face. I’m like, “Intimidated?” I also learned that you don’t really repeat the question.

FJ: Don’t repeat it.

DG: So I said, “Excuse me. Can you please repeat the question?” So I could think of my answer. He said, “Yes, you have four strikes against you. You’re a woman.”

FJ: Oh, name them. The first one was woman.

DG: And that I was young.

FJ: Young.

DG: And Latina.

FJ: And Latina.

DG: And he also said that you’re in the minority party.

FJ: Democrat. He had to think about that, didn’t he?

DG: On the rim of it, I said, “Thank you so much for that question. For those very four reasons, I know that I will be an asset to this legislature, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on all issues and serve all Kansans,” and then I dropped the mic. I was so nervous, but I have to say seconds before that interview, I had one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and she came up to me. I had just met her, Representative Stephanie Sharp, and she passed me, and she said, “Congratulations.” She said, “Let me help you do something. You need to move your nametag up so that the camera can get it well.” And she didn’t have to do that.

FJ: Just those little things.

DG: It was a big deal. I thanked her later on that day, and I thanked her a few years later. That was amazing. You didn’t know me, and you did that.

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FJ: Yes, you were helpful. When you went through that first process of being the first in many ways really and also thinking about how can I use my presence to make the world better, to make my family's life better, the people around us? When you were thinking in those terms, what came to the front of your mind, as you knew you were in that position now?

DG: I actually requested to serve on certain committees. I requested to serve on Labor and Commerce, which I did all six years.

FJ: Really?

DG: Because of coming from a labor background family and also our small business restaurant.

FJ: Right.

DG: I also requested to serve on the Health and Human Services Committee. The main reason I ran for office is my mother got sick in 2002, and we almost lost her. One of the situations that happened is, and I know it's a little embarrassing to share, but she didn't have health insurance. The grace period had expired. So she was in this situation, financial situation. It affected all of us.

FJ: Yes.

DG: I just thought that was so unfair to treat her like a number, and I wanted to make a difference. I know that's really at the federal level, but that was one of the main reasons I ran. I wanted to serve on that committee.

FJ: It gave you energy. And the others?

DG: And the others, miraculously, and I thought that was an accident, I got appointed to serve on the Judiciary Committee, which is one of the most powerful committees I had served on. I remember going to leadership and saying, "I think you made a mistake. I'm not an attorney," and they were like, "Yes, we know." I was like, "So why am I sitting on the Judiciary Committee? It's mostly attorneys," and they said, "For that reason. You bring a practical lens," which was totally true, but I didn't see it that way at first.

FJ: Right.

DG: And it was very powerful to be able to sit in those committees, probably one of my most active committees. Actually, they all were. And then serving on Elections, that was huge to me, big time. Another reason that I ran for office, that I knew elections matter. Serving on the Elections Committee and also the Military Service Committee was a huge piece to me. I have family members who served the country. So being able to be at the table and not on the menu was huge.

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FJ: It is huge. As you walked down those aisles and met those people and saw what the business was every day, did you feel like it was possible to make any choices that would improve anything in those categories?

DG: To be honest, in the beginning, I thought I could change the world by myself, which was a stupid thought.

FJ: No.

DG: It wasn't stupid in a sense, but what I had to learn the hard way is that I had to work with the other side of the aisle and teamwork and compromise. I remember at one point I assumed that another colleague of mine would not have allowed a bill of mine to be heard.

FJ: Okay.

DG: I remember asking one of my mentors, State Representative Tom Sawyer, I said, "She won't give me a hearing." He said, "Have you asked her?" And I was like, "Well, no, but she doesn't want"—he was like, "But have you asked her?" I was like, "No." He was like, "Go ask her."

I was so nervous, and shame on me to assume that she wouldn't give me a hearing. So I walked over to the other side of the aisle. I was like, "Representative, is it possible to have a hearing for my HPV vaccination [bill]?" She said, "Yes, sure. Get with my assistant. Let's put it on the rolls," and we did. She actually—a lot of media was there. It was a controversial bill. It was a lesson learned that I needed to open my eyes and do that. That has helped me in my entire career then and when I ran two national organizations in Washington, DC and then coming back with those same relationships then when I came back as Cabinet Secretary of Labor to my work now. We have to see all sides, and we have to compromise.

FJ: What was your being selected to do that Cabinet work? The governor really just pointed her finger and asked you and said, "You will be the one." How were you feeling, and what do you think happened as a result of your saying yes?"

DG: You know, it was powerful to serve as Secretary of Labor. Again, I served all six years on the Labor and Commerce Committee as a state legislator previous years. When in DC, I was there for nine years prior to coming back, I worked and served at the largest Teachers Union. So having been a part of that, seeing the local and state and national levels, I think it was very important. And also being able to work with business, coming from a small business background, understanding that.

And then on the onset of the pandemic, I knew firsthand what that pain was. My own family, we had to shut down our restaurant twice. We were applying for every federal grant possible in order to survive. And we're watching all of our friends on each side of us shut down their restaurants because they didn't survive.

FJ: Yes, they did not.

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DG: So learning that firsthand and having some of our employees having to go also through the unemployment system, engaging into the issues with the antiquated system that we had, and also taking full responsibility on the issues that we're having, that happened under my watch. I'm going to take full responsibility on that. And being able to also keep the community calm when we could and informed absolutely when we could. I'm still doing that in my work today at the United States Department of Labor.

FJ: At the United States Department of Labor. When you look at the milestones that you have set and passed, which stand out the most for you?

DG: Oh, wow. They're all intertwined. I have to say the foundation.

FJ: Really?

DG: Growing up as a little girl, one of five daughters in our restaurant, we learned early on customer service. One, the customer is always right, and when sometimes they might not be, then we have a conversation. We communicate. At the end of the day, we still serve.

I learned those skills early on. Growing up again with four sisters in a small house, I also learned compromise very quick. That has taken me through all parts of my career.

FJ: All parts of your career. If a young woman was talking to you now about what would be one of the more important political jobs that needs ethnic representation, how would you talk to that person about that?

DG: First, I would say, "What is your passion?" We need women at every table. I specifically say "women," when I speak in every part of my identity, that one is the strongest.

FJ: Women.

DG: Growing up one of five daughters and then a whole bunch of aunts and very active in my sorority as well, which started at the University into today. We need women, and especially women of color, at the table. So my answer to them is "What is your passion?" and capitalize on that passion and bring that to the table. We need people in public service. We need people serving on boards. We need it in corporate America, every facet.

And also in that leadership, it will grow more leadership. I have to say one of the main reasons I ended up running for office is because I saw the possibility in my former boss, State Senator Leticia Van de Putte. I saw myself in her, and I saw the possibility. Prior to that, I didn't have that kind of—I want to say "faith in myself." I just didn't think it was possible.

FJ: As time goes on, do you feel like you're going to become more active politically as opposed to where you are now? Do you think you like the idea of stability?

DG: It depends how you define stability.

FJ: You're right.

DG: I will say this. I love, love, love—I have grown up in a family of public service. I will always be in public service. So that's a fact. Whatever form that's in is different. I mean, we are in a different time right now where what's warranted is leadership, good leadership, and leadership from various genders and then also various backgrounds. I think whenever I'm given the opportunity, I will step up and do that.

FJ: And your voice will be heard. At what occasion did you question whether you had made the right decision, for example, to be in the Kansas legislature?

DG: I'd have to say like signing my name on the dotted line, and then after getting elected, I was like, "This stuff is real."

FJ: Oh, it's real.

DG: And then being in the community at all times. That's why I think it's important to share our stories. I love that we're doing this project. Whoever watches this will hopefully, even if it's just one person, will be inspired to, "If she did it at the age of twenty-six, twenty-seven"—

FJ: Inspiration is really, really important. So we you also think about it, how do you think being involved politically as you were, how do you think that affected the rest of your family or neighbors or workmates, whatever?

DG: The easy answer there is they see the possibility. In my opinion, real leadership grows out of leadership. Like I mentioned before, my family, a lot of us are involved in various levels. I have a sister who's an FBI special agent, another one who works for a foundation. My two younger sisters run the restaurant, but they also are involved on community boards, as my grandparents have and my mother in the church. So it's all around. It was sort of like the inevitable.

But my nieces and nephews now see like, "Oh, you do that." They go with us to go vote, and they absolutely walk with us door to door.

FJ: They really do.

DG: When we go door to door and register people to vote, a huge family tradition.

FJ: So it's a family practice. Tradition is a better word. I really like that idea of tradition. So your inspiration not only came from people you were close to, but were there other people that inspired you to do this?

DG: Many and also inspired me to continue. As I mentioned, [Senator Leticia Van de Putte](#) from Texas when I was getting my master's down there, State Representative Minority Leader Tom Sawyer who's currently the Minority Leader.

FJ: Still there.

DG: It's interesting. When I was thirteen years old, I paged for him.

FJ: Really?

DG: Yes. That was when [Joan Finney](#) was our governor. It was really cool. Again, I saw another woman at the age of thirteen as governor, and then fast forward, when [Kathleen Sebelius](#) ran, I worked on her campaign and then worked with her when she was a state rep. And obviously with Governor Kelly, we were serving in the legislature, and then she was governor. So for me, it's been important to see all of my colleagues like that. You know, [Sister Therese Bangert](#), I've always been grounded in my faith, and sometimes I've been beaten up a little by people in my faith for some of my votes is what I mean.

FJ: Oh, yes. And that also makes you unique because the very essence of who we are, we have to be true to ourselves

DG: Absolutely.

FJ: And it's not the same as everybody else. If it is, I don't know how you live with yourself. You have to really understand that there are all kinds of things that affect everybody in different ways. And with that sort of knowledge, when you're, for example, dealing with your younger nieces and nephews, do they understand that there's still going to be a place for them because these things are not solved just because I ran or just because I didn't or whatever?

DG: Yes. Actually one of my nephews is already talking about when he runs for office. It's sort of like, "She did it. I want to do it." He went door to door even in his mommy's tummy. Again, it's sort of like ingrained. And then taking everything to the table whether it be our upbringing, the exposure to the restaurant and our faith, too. I was saying a second ago, Sister Therese was a huge part of my life, still is. I met her while I was in the legislature, and she still is involved. There were moments when I would literally cry and be in the hallways or in my office, and she would come, and we would pray. It was those times when she got me through the tough times. We stay in touch to this day. But it was, I had a kitchen cabinet of mentors of religious, of other people that I want to be like, and just people who keep me grounded and tell me what I needed to hear and what I wanted to hear.

FJ: Say that again. You don't always what?

DG: What I need to hear and not what I want to hear. I've learned you should never have any family members a part of your kitchen cabinet because sometimes they'll tell you, "You're perfect" or not.

FJ: As you've struggled with how to be a representative of your community, was it at any time a place when you thought, "I can't do this. This is just too much" or whatever. Did you ever come up with that feeling?

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DG: I did. February of 2005, to be exact.

FJ: Really?

DG: I often tell this story. I had a colleague on the other side of the aisle. There's a special restroom for legislators. We had just got done debating on the House floor English as an official language. It was contentious.

FJ: Really?

DG: Then we had a break, and we went to the restroom. One of my colleagues said to me, "Hi, Representative Garcia, I just want you to know that your English is very good. You speak really good English." I was like floored and shocked that she would have said that to me. I was just shocked. I was speechless. I didn't say anything. I remember going into the stall and then upset with myself that I didn't respond to her. I didn't know what to say. I was just shocked that the statement was made.

And then I became angry. As I came out of the stall and washed my hands, I then went to the House floor and shared what just happened. I just remember being so infuriated and insulted and also like humiliated to an extent, and I really wanted to go over there and tell her off a few minutes later, but obviously I didn't.

I remember telling somebody. They were like, "Leave it be right now. She doesn't really know." At the end of the day, it was I think ignorance. I don't think she was really trying to be mean. But other things were happening in that week, certain votes that I was about to have to make on choice that was going to be in conflict with my Catholic faith and really standing up for what the rightest thing is for women.

I remember I just went to my car that day and just cried. I called one of my mentors in Texas, Reverend Hernandez, and I said, "I can't do this. I just want to quit." I was crying, and he was like, "Okay, Delia, breathe. Calm down. You're not going to do anything today." He was like, "Leave the Capitol building and just go breathe."

I remember driving out of the garage and putting on some of my favorite music by Selena. I just kept crying, but I turned my mindset in a better way. I slept on it. I was like, "I'm not going to quit." He was like, "Does anybody else want you to quit?" I was like, "I don't know. But after that happened, I don't feel like I'm doing a good job." I told him. I feel tough. I feel like I had to be more Catholic to Catholic constituents, not so Catholic to my non-Catholic constituents, more American to the ones who don't think I'm American enough, and it's exhausting.

FJ: It is exhausting.

DG: He was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Get over it." He was like, "You're making a bigger deal than what it is." And it was true. I thought that was important, too.

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FJ: But that showed your sensitivity though.

DG: And growth.

FJ: Yes, and growth because sometimes when people divide things up in ways that are sort of superficial divisions, you do have to come to the fact that, "Well, that's the way they think, but let me tell you what's true." And when you did that, you were able to get feedback from people that you had confidence in.

DG: Yes.

FJ: At this juncture, are you thinking about that you might, I'm just kind of asking. What are you thinking?

DG: Of public service?

FJ: There you go.

DG: Like I said, I will always be involved in public service.

FJ: I just want to make sure we've got that rounded out. Yes.

DG: Right now in this point in my life, I enjoy serving in executive leadership. What I enjoy a thousand times more is growing it. One thing I've always done before I ran in 2004 and even more so when I was a state rep all six years and at the national level when I moved to Washington, DC in 2011 is I have intentionally trained women to run for political office, young women, women of color in particular. I have just found a huge joy in that and now have a lot of amazing actually mentees who are now elected officials, now running for Congress. They started at city, then state, and we're now all over the place.

FJ: Really?

DG: I want to continue that. I just wrote my first book.

FJ: What's the name of that book?

DG: It's actually on national Latina leadership. We are coming up with the name still.

FJ: So it hasn't been published yet.

DG: No, it will be out Christmas this year.

FJ: And you haven't decided on the name.

DG: No.

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FJ: Are you writing it with anyone or just all on your own?

DG: I actually interviewed fifty women from twenty-three states of three generations—my elders, mid-career, and millennial students that have worked with me. I think it's important for people to see themselves at every level. So one of my amazing mentors who is a civil rights leader, [Dolores Huerta](#), she wrote the foreword. She just turned ninety-two years old last week. I want to be like her. I want her energy.

FJ: Even at this age.

DG: Yes. She was organizing with Cesar Chavez for the United Farmworkers back when it was dangerous somewhat. She's been doing it, fighting for women's rights, immigrant rights, farmworker rights for decades. She shows me that the fight never ends.

FJ: So one of the newer issues is the border. What's your idea about that border stuff?

DG: Yes. It's always been an issue. I'm a second generation Mexican American. Both my parents are born here. All my grandparents are born in Mexico. When my parents were growing up, it was a line in the sand. Unfortunately, we have not updated our immigration laws since 1987.

FJ: Has it been that long?

DG: Yes. During the ARA , the American Reform Act. It was an issue when I was a state legislator. Kansas is, I have to say kudos to Kansas. We were the fourth state in the country to pass in-state tuition for undocumented students in 2004. I was elected in '04, but I didn't get sworn in until 2005. So in 2005, it was always a debate, and Kansas still has that law today. So it's always been an issue.

FJ: And we have to hang on, don't we?

DG: Yes. Let's talk real talk here. It could economic impact—our state, this country benefits from all of it.

FJ: You are absolutely true.

DG: I do hope and I trust but hope more that our Congress and every administration forward, because it hasn't been done yet, do something about this for the economic reasons and also for family reasons. Ripping families apart, who wants to do that?

FJ: I don't, know, but a lot of it has been done. And in that regard, do you see there being any new ways that people can begin to think about this that would make this much easier and more straightforward?

DG: I think again acknowledging the economic impacts but that's like first, I think even more powerful is look at our brothers and sisters on each side of us. Everybody in this country knows

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somebody who's impacted by that, whether it is a caregiver, whether it is somebody who picks the food that we eat every day.

FJ: Every day.

DG: Somebody who cleans our homes, does our laun—at every facet. So to acknowledge what those contributions are and to see what is a smart way to create a pathway to citizenship for families and also a fair way of making sure that we do it all around.

Now is there a magic bullet? No, not right now. But what does need to happen, what I've learned as a legislator and to this day is we have to have people come to the table and talk and compromise. We have seen that done, but then it always falls through.

FJ: Other issues, yes. So do you see that as something that can happen within the near future? Is it still going to be this long wait?

DG: Unfortunately, I don't think it is for the whole family. What I do think and what I do trust and what I do know for a fact from various articles is the support for Dreamer students.

FJ: Yes.

DG: Is there. That is definitely a nonpartisan issue. We have huge leaders on both sides, every past administration supports Dreamers. Again, they've seen the contributions. Yes, their parents are, too, but that tends to be contentious. I think once we see, like during this pandemic, who was taking care of us? Some of the Dreamer students were at the frontlines, these essential workers.

So for me, I think sharing those personal, powerful stories is with the power of changing minds and hearts and votes.

FJ: Yes. As we walk through this sort of—it's known territory, but really is unknown is what are the words or the examples or the actions that people would accept who have been so negative about it? When you look at how the contributions have been made by others, the people that are making the laws against them, I still wonder, what does it take for people just to be sharing and caring with people who need you?

DG: Yes.

FJ: One of the things that's real interesting to me is that when people can take care of themselves, they're not a burden in the way that they've been described before, you know what I mean. So, at this juncture, do you think that it's time for us then to begin to be clear about sort of a road to success on those issues? Is there a way to develop—I don't know exactly how to say it, but a way to understand these issues so that even if it takes a long time, we're going by steps in a direction that's more positive?

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DG: So my answer is probably going to be a little controversial. But it is to elect people that look like the rest of America who are willing to come to the table and talk and discuss and compromise and create those laws.

I think in my humble opinion, that is not what we have in Congress right now. We have some of them on both sides of the aisle, but not enough. So we need new leadership. New leadership means we need to grow it. We need to train it.

FJ: Right.

DG: And that's where the love of my life is. I don't have my own children. I have a lot of nieces and nephews. I like being the favorite aunt. But for me, that's that.

FJ: That's where we need to go.

DG: Yes.

FJ: Is there anything that you can think of that you can bring to this conversation that will give us more hope?

DG: Absolutely. I have seen these leaders, up-and-coming leaders, new leaders, current leaders, and have faith that things are going to change. What has happened I think even during this pandemic, 1) this pandemic has pulled back at the curtain on inequities that have always existed, but now everyone can see. So various things have happened, including with the murder of George Floyd, have opened people's eyes and also inspired people who would never have thought to run for political office and public service to step up to the plate.

And for me, what I've seen happening in the last couple of years is the support of the individuals. Then again, we're seeing new leadership coming to the table, and that's exciting. We're also seeing other new stuff come to the table that's not so exciting.

So, again, the need is there, and I think where my place is, my purpose, what God has given me gifts and skills to do is to help support that, and whatever opportunities come down on the line, I will always embrace that.

FJ: Be an embraceable you. I know that there are things that you would like to leave with us in terms of that pathway that we all are looking for, and you've given us some of them. Are there any ways that you can see now that you have observed in other societies that we might use as an example?

DG: One of the things that I saw in San Antonio, actually here in Wichita, it's like Grow Your Own Teacher.

FJ: Yes.

INTERVIEW OF DELIA GARCIA BY FRANCES JACKSON

DG: It was at Wichita State University. It was a program that would invest in the student. Then as they graduated, they would invest as they graduated and entered a career, investing in new leadership, making sure we grow it, train it, and keep growing it. That I think is the most powerful move we can make at this point.

FJ: Yes.

DG: And whether that's something that exists right now or whether that's something we create, in my opinion, I think it needs to be created. I'm working with some other individuals across the country right now to do that.

FJ: Oh, really? Explain that.

DG: I co-founded, it's called a Latina State Legislative Caucus. We are working with Black state legislators as well. Our group is noble, and we have come together. We are coming together. Right now because of the pandemic, we have been doing it virtual, webinars and sharing personal stories of how these amazing leaders have gotten elected, what policies they're bringing forward, and also growing more leadership. So continuing to build on that and creating youth leadership programs is something that I've always been a part of. When I was at Wichita State University, we started a *Si Se Puede* Day for Wichita feeder schools to come to school and see themselves in us. I believe that's where a lot of the students chose Wichita State later on in life because they saw themselves in us.

FJ: Yes.

DG: So that's what we want to continue growing, especially here in Wichita, Kansas.

FJ: It's been a pleasure.

DG: Thank you.

FJ: I really appreciate you taking your time to be with us today, and I guess that's it.

DG: Thank you, Fran.

[End of File]