

State Room Arizona 008: Monica Yelin | Faith. Family. Freedom | The Hispanic Liberty Movement

Podcast Transcription | Article-Style Transcript

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Full Article-Style Transcript

Introduction and Monica Yelin's Background

Scot Mussi: Hi, welcome to The State Room, a podcast dedicated to covering the key issues and events that will impact the future of our state. I'm your host, Scot Mussi. Today on our program, we're going to be talking about the importance of taking the message of opportunity, freedom, and family values to the Hispanic community here in Arizona.

Scot Mussi: Until recently, outreach to Hispanic voters has been a domain dominated by the left, a sustained, year-round activity fueled by millions of dollars coming from out-of-state liberal billionaires and philanthropic foundations. But now, one group is looking to fill the void and take our conservative message directly to voters here in our state. The Hispanic Liberty Alliance, created in 2023, is taking the message of faith, family, and freedom to the Hispanic community here in Arizona.

Scot Mussi: Joining us today to talk about the Hispanic Liberty Alliance is Monica Yelin. Monica is the executive director of the HLA and has extensive background and experience in grassroots organizing, community engagement, and public outreach. Monica, thank you for joining us today.

Monica Yelin: Thank you, Scot, for having me today.

Scot Mussi: Before we dive into the Hispanic Liberty Alliance and the work that you're doing there, tell us a little bit about yourself, a little bit about your background and your story, and what brought you to the freedom movement here in Arizona.

Monica Yelin: Well, I came to America in 1998. I came from Colombia. I was born in Bogota, and I came here with just a piece of luggage and \$300. That's all I had. And I was full of dreams. And now I believe I'm the American Dream.

Monica Yelin: I believe in this country. I love America. I love the opportunities we have here. And the reason why I'm doing this job and working with the Hispanic community is because I deeply appreciate our roots. I believe that being Hispanic is not an achievement. It is a heritage, and we should be proud of it. We should be valued by our contributions and our individual characters.

Monica Yelin: I want everyone in the community, especially in Arizona where we work, to understand that they are the American Dream and everything is achievable. And I believe that if I communicate, educate, and help them thrive, they will succeed the way that I have succeeded and many of us have succeeded in this country.

Scot Mussi: How did you pick Arizona? When you were looking to come to America, what made Arizona your destination? Did you know people here?

Monica Yelin: Interesting that my welcoming in America was California. I moved to California. I was hired by a company and I moved to California. Then I moved to New York, and then I was tired of the potholes. Believe it or not, I was tired of the policies, the environment in New York, and the cost of living. And I said, "Let me look for a state that really provides what I look for."

Monica Yelin: This is the state that has provided everything I need. This is a state where we have freedoms. We have small government. I can say we have fiscal responsibility. We have lower taxes. So that's the reason why I came to Arizona. It's a better state. That's why a lot of people come here.

Scot Mussi: See, you're not from Colombia. You're a New York-California refugee to Arizona.

Monica Yelin: Exactly.

Scot Mussi: And as we tell everybody that comes from California, don't California our Arizona. And most that come here, actually the majority, have embraced that message. They don't want to see our state slide into what they left.

Building the Hispanic Liberty Alliance

Scot Mussi: In building the Hispanic Liberty Alliance as the executive director there, what has excited you the most to lead the organization and to build this new outreach organization here in Arizona?

Monica Yelin: To see that we have built a platform, a space for Hispanics to thrive, to grow, to become leaders of their community, and seeing how they absorb all this knowledge. We are an organization that has three pillars: education, business growth, and civic engagement. Seeing them being involved with their communities, understanding that it's important being involved with the electoral process, understanding civic engagement, and understanding education for their children is important for the future. Seeing them coming back is what we love and enjoy the most with this organization.

Scot Mussi: It seems as if politicians, especially a lot of people in the political class, will often talk about the Hispanic community, but there has historically been a failure to actually go and talk to the Hispanic community. There seems to be this disconnect. Why do you think that often happens, especially from the conservative side of the aisle? I think that's changing now, but why historically has there been that lack of direct engagement?

Monica Yelin: I think that the conservative side needs to understand that they have to show up early. They have to connect with the Hispanic community two years before the election. We need to feel that we're valued, that we are appreciated, and that we have a seat at the table.

Monica Yelin: A lot of politicians think that with a last-minute taco night or a last-minute on-the-fly coalition two months before the election, they will win Hispanic votes or they will understand the community. They see us as a monolithic community. We're not. We're different. We have diverse jobs, professions, and even cultures within our culture. So we want them to understand and listen and see exactly what we look for.

Monica Yelin: We value legislation. We understand. We want to learn legislation. This is a pattern that I have observed within the members, the friends of the alliance, I call them. Anybody that attends the Hispanic Liberty Alliance loves to hear about legislation and things that have impacted their community so they can learn. When they go and pick their candidates, when they go and vote on an election, they understand already the impact that this legislation has made on their communities, their families, and their business. Then they want to prevent bad legislation from impacting them in a negative way. Politicians fail to mention achievements and policy that impacts the community, and I think that's a big problem.

Monica Yelin: I want to say something very important. We need to learn from the past. The Florida GOP in 2022 collected over \$143 million. They invested millions in Hispanic outreach, and look at the results. They flipped Miami-Dade County. They had the governor elected. They had the majority in the state of Florida.

Monica Yelin: The same thing with Texas. They invest in the Hispanic community. Investment is important. They invested in cultural centers, business centers, and community centers. Look at Governor Abbott. Every single time, he narrows margins in every election and he has flipped some counties in the south. These are examples of how investing in the Hispanic community is worth it. We are the largest minority and the fastest growing in the country, and we're pivotal for the next election. They have to take us seriously.

Scot Mussi: Do you think through the HLA that Arizona can have that same type of success that has happened in Texas and Florida? What you talked about there, as far as parachuting in and then leaving, that's kind of what we've historically seen in Arizona with communicating on pro-freedom issues. This is bigger than an election. The left knows that. It's why they have these ongoing groups. It's why the Hispanic Liberty Alliance exists now. Elections and politics are downstream from culture. You have to have that consistent engagement. So do you think what they did in Texas and Florida can happen here in Arizona?

Monica Yelin: It's absolutely possible. We started seeing a difference in the last election. We saw that we went up eight points in Santa Cruz County. We flipped Yuma County. We saw blue pockets in Phoenix that went for the conservative side. So we know it's possible. We know that if we're relational and organic, we make a big difference.

Monica Yelin: Hispanics are understanding something: free is different than freedom. Progress is completely different than progressive. They are understanding through the Hispanic Liberty Alliance and other similar organizations and different politicians that being a global citizen is not a good thing and globalism is not good. But if you think about your sovereignty and the country that welcomed you, they are learning to love America, the country that welcomed them. Many of them were born here, but many were born abroad like me. So I've seen a difference. I have noticed the changes. I noticed people are very curious and desire to learn, and they're looking for a change, definitely.

Education, Events, and Daily-Life Issues

Scot Mussi: This isn't something where this type of engagement, I assume, you can just show up and talk politics. Most people are turned off by that. It has to be talking about things that are directly impacting their lives on a daily basis and doing it through education and information. You mentioned school choice and ESAs. Is that one issue you have found that you can talk about and relate to, because it ultimately could impact them when it comes to political issues but is also something they care about on a day-to-day basis?

Monica Yelin: Absolutely. There is something that many families discuss when they attend our events or when we engage with them individually or at home.

Scot Mussi: Can you describe one of those types of events? What do they look like if someone wants to attend an event by the Hispanic Liberty Alliance?

Monica Yelin: We have, let's say, a dinner, a networking dinner, because everybody loves networking and we're a pro-business organization. We want you to come and engage, exchange business cards, promote your business, meet others, and build relationships. So we start with a networking social hour. We have a dinner. We have a panel of experts, and we do Q&A and inform people.

Monica Yelin: One of the things that we discuss is we always ask who is using empowerment scholarship accounts. You will be surprised that 30% of the people in the public say, "I know about it and I use them." We want more people to know, because a lot of people don't know. But the ones that know always tell us, "It's the best thing for my children." Why? Because education should feed the child and not the other way around.

Monica Yelin: Many public schools are good, but not every public school feeds your child. Sometimes you want private education, religious education, or vocational education. Your children have different needs. It's proven that people that use the scholarship accounts, children when they go to college, they perform better. They perform better at work and they do better in high school. So we know that this is a benefit for them. It's enriching and it's important, and we teach them about that. We talk about scholarship accounts. It's very important and a hot topic right now in Arizona.

Scot Mussi: As you started building the Hispanic Liberty Alliance, what is some of the feedback you hear from Hispanic families and businesses? What are some of the concerns that you're frequently

hearing right now? Has anything surprised you as far as some of the feedback you've been hearing from Hispanic families as you've been out there doing work with the HLA?

Monica Yelin: You must adhere to your audience and understand each family and each person individually. When we talk to them, we have business owners that say, "I'm concerned with the economy, but I'm so happy to see all these benefits from the federal government." Our extended tax deduction for business owners, thank God for this administration and for the United States Congress that it has been extended forever.

Monica Yelin: We have families talking about education. That's a very important part of Hispanic communities. We are very, very traditional. We're very faith-oriented. Hispanics are concerned about seeing God being put aside. Certain politicians and certain groups are making fun of God or putting God to the side. Religion is very important for Hispanics. Religion, safety, education, economy, and immigration are a big deal, believe it or not, especially for legal immigrants like me. Those are the big topics, the big concerns right now, and those are talked about everywhere we go.

Trust, Partnerships, and Community Resources

Scot Mussi: Have you found it hard to build trust as you've been going out there and talking with people, or do you find it pretty easy to get people to engage? A lot of the issues that conservatives and people in the pro-freedom movement care about seem to be aligned with most people in the Hispanic community.

Monica Yelin: The Hispanic community is very smart. We might have an accent, but we don't have an accent in our brains. I tell people all the time that Hispanics are very open and they want to learn. The way we build trust with them, the way that we know they keep coming back, is because they like the Hispanic Liberty Alliance. They learn. They get value when they come to us, and we just show up constantly.

Monica Yelin: We educate them. We teach them things that they don't learn anywhere else. That's the reason why the Hispanic Liberty Alliance was created, because we found a need and a niche for education. Most nonprofits are charity. Most nonprofits don't focus on civic engagement or policy or advocacy. That's what we do. We teach people tools to solve their daily issues and their long-term problems. We teach them how to contact the government if they have issues with federal agencies. People learn something new with us, and it sparks their curiosity. They want to come back. That's the reason why they trust us, because they always find solutions with us. No matter what, they can call us and we can find guides, resources, and tools for them.

Scot Mussi: Have you noticed you're getting more national attention? Arizona has become a swing state as far as some of these more competitive recent elections. Have you noticed more national attention, and are you finding that you're getting more partners to work with that want to help on the ground here to do this ongoing, consistent engagement within the Hispanic community?

Monica Yelin: Absolutely. We just became partners and members of the Latino Leaders Alliance. It's a big national organization, and we have been engaging with others. As Hispanic Liberty Alliance, we have 12 national Hispanic organizations and we have been engaging at the national level. We have had at least four events so far in Washington and Florida. We have been at the White House. We have been invited. We have had meetings there. The President of the United States knows we exist, and we think it's important, his administration and his staff.

Monica Yelin: So we definitely are getting traction, and it's important to be involved nationally. It's important to know about organizations, to build relationships, to help others and to help us too, because we rise by lifting others.

Scot Mussi: Looking at what you guys have built and looking ahead, what big projects and events are you working on this year that you either have done, are looking to do, or are working on right now as we head toward November and 2026?

Monica Yelin: We have been very impactful over the three years. We had fentanyl forums. We were part of the substance coalition national day at the Capitol. We have brought people to mass sessions at the Capitol, and that's very impactful. We have had many engagements of any kind, but all educational.

Scot Mussi: Here in Arizona, you're doing mass sessions at the Capitol?

Monica Yelin: Mass sessions at the Capitol here in Arizona. We have had many, many engagements of any kind, but all educational. We just had a citizenship class, and we had a justice of the Supreme Court presiding at the graduation. We have a grant-writing class coming up. We have a fentanyl forum coming up in Tucson. We have an evening with the sheriff of Maricopa County and the county attorney. We have multiple classes and educational events coming up.

Monica Yelin: We definitely are going strong. We're growing. We're impacting businesses, people, and individuals. We're connecting with many churches. We just started registering people to vote. We just have a bunch of registrations in the last two weeks. So we are there. We are intentional, and we are engaging with everyone we can. We're building relationships and coaching and giving classes, and we're very excited.

Scot Mussi: You've got a big event coming up in Yuma.

Monica Yelin: Yes, we have an event this week in Yuma. We have a business launching with the mayor and elected officials where we discuss cost of living and local issues, civic engagement, and what we do. We're introducing the organization to the residents of Yuma this Thursday at 12 at the Hills Gastropub by a golf course. It's going to be very exciting. We're looking forward. It will be tomorrow, actually.

Scot Mussi: That's great. At these types of events, as part of a forum, do local leaders come and attend these events too?

Monica Yelin: Yes, we get local leaders, elected officials, pastors, business owners, families, employees, and all kinds of Hispanics that attend, who are very interested in learning and gaining value and maybe becoming leaders. We have so many that have come to our events and now they are leading their communities. They're mobilizing their communities. They are learning how to reach out to the government. They are reaching out to learn how to fix their local issues. They are participating in local initiatives and making an impact.

Resistance, Values, and Long-Term Vision

Scot Mussi: Have you noticed anything from the left? Have you caught any shade from people on the left from your group and any of the activities that you're doing, or do they generally stay out of your lane and stay away from you?

Monica Yelin: We have a little bit of resistance. We have heard that certain places know us for being a conservative organization. But we also are proud to tell you that we have a lot of people from the other side that are coming to our events. People that are reasonable, people that are rational, people that are willing and open to learn, and they have even changed their minds.

Monica Yelin: We have one of our members of our advisory board who used to be a super extreme left person, and now this person is super conservative, understanding that family values are important, small government, cut red tape, less bureaucracy, all these things. So we're very excited, and we have actually worked with the other side. I have bridged that gap many times.

Scot Mussi: That type of work, especially when you're talking about that type of civic engagement and being able to work within these communities, is how you bring people in the door. They won't listen to you talk about the importance of this or even understanding what makes Arizona a great place to live unless you build that relationship. Everybody that comes here, by and large, wants to make sure that Arizona stays a great place for families, for businesses, and for entrepreneurs. We

have to make sure we keep that. Being able to take that message and do it in a way that's not going to be off-putting is critically important.

Monica Yelin: It is very important. Hispanics need to feel that they are important. They are valuable. They have a seat at the table. They can prosper, and that's what we want. They are very excited to see that they have possibilities. We must love capitalism. We can make as much money as we want in America. We can do whatever we want. We're free to vote for whomever we want. We are not obligated to vote like in Australia, and we should value that.

Monica Yelin: We should value that we have the freedoms that we have here. Not like in China, where you have to adhere to what the government tells you. You can make money in China, but you have to say and do whatever the government wants. So we're very excited to see that people understand loving America, respecting America, honoring the country, and being proud of our values. Being proud of being Hispanic is still important, but we should assimilate, learn the culture, be here, honor it, and respect it.

Scot Mussi: Last question: your long-term vision. If you could see what the Hispanic Liberty Alliance is going to grow into in the next five years, what would you want the organization to be? What role would you love to see it play in Arizona to make sure Arizona stays on the right path?

Monica Yelin: We see the Hispanic Liberty Alliance being the most influential conservative Hispanic organization in the state, and we want to expand eventually to other states. We want to bring the message somewhere else. But we know we need to be strong here first. We need to make an impact here first. And I believe that if we continue doing what we're doing, we're going to impact triple the amount of lives we have impacted already.

Monica Yelin: We have changed people's lives. I have many examples of things that we have done for individuals that changed the course of their lives because they came to us, because they learned how to fix an issue. We want to expand our educational classes and our programs. We want to create more leaders, find more leaders in the community. We want to expand and maybe have chapters all over the state so we can be constantly everywhere changing and educating people, raising awareness about elections, raising awareness about what's on your ballot, what kind of propositions you have, understanding them, understanding how to reach out to your government, make them accountable, talking to them, mobilizing others. That's what I see us doing.

Scot Mussi: You would like to see it be the go-to resource for information in Hispanic communities all throughout the state or potentially throughout the country.

Monica Yelin: Yes, we see us doing that and partnering with as many people as we can: nonprofits all over the state, impacting people, impacting businesses, and impacting the political climate in Arizona.

Scot Mussi: If somebody is interested in learning more about the Hispanic Liberty Alliance, or maybe wants to participate and join and volunteer and help the organization, how could they do that?

Monica Yelin: They can start with looking at our website, which is HispanicLibertyAlliance.org. It's all in English and Spanish. Again, HispanicLibertyAlliance.org. We are on X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and we have a YouTube channel. Please watch our videos. Please follow us on social media. You know what we do. We have activities listed in our calendar. You can reach out to us. You can even call me. We are available for you if you want to call 623-201-3514. Again, 623-201-3514.

Monica Yelin: We're available at any time. We coach. We do coaching one-on-one, and we connect you with experts. We even help you open an LLC and get your EIN and get everything running. We have an agreement with firms that have generously given their time and their services for only \$150.

We have a nonprofit that can help you get your citizenship for as low as \$500. So we have all these resources and agreements with nonprofits.

Scot Mussi: I'm glad you brought that up because it's not just the education and being there as a group or event group. You're providing resources to individuals to help them out with various things that they might need. They don't have answers to questions, whether it be taxes or other types of problems they might be running into, or just filing various laws here in Arizona.

Monica Yelin: Yes. The Arizona Justice Center is one of our partners. They are pro bono lawyers that will help you with the small legal issues. They will guide you. They help the homeless as well. So we have a lot of resources and a lot of information. We're like a little encyclopedia for you.

Scot Mussi: Monica, thank you for joining us today.

Monica Yelin: Thank you so much for having me.

Scot Mussi: And to everybody watching, thank you for joining us here at The State Room, where we continue to cover issues and events that will make sure we keep Arizona free. Thank you.