

## When State Bills Failed, Polly Baca Found a Federal Solution for Farm Workers

Another thing that I was able to do, I introduced a bill to require farmers with more than ten employees to have sanitation facilities, port-a-potties, on their farms. I couldn't get it through. It was the most difficult bill to have because of the bigotry, the horrible, horrible response by some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, the Republicans. They were just bigoted when they talked about, "They didn't need to have port-a-potties or sanitation facilities on the farms because they wouldn't know how to use them anyhow."

It was that kind of language. It was so bad that after that bill died in committee, there was only one Republican that voted with me, and it was a woman Kathy [Kathleen] Spelts, state representative.

That was one of the few times that when it was over, I went to my office and cried. The pain was still there of the bigotry.

But what I was able to do, I had been appointed by Ronald Reagan because I was vice-chair of the National Democratic Party, and the Democrats and Republicans had gotten together to create what became the National Endowment for Democracy. It included this amazing group of people like Henry Kissinger and Zig [Zbigniew] Brzezinski were on that committee. And I was, too, because the chair of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party were both on there. And then I as vice chair and a black woman as vice chair of the Republicans, we were both on there too, along with the president of the AFL-CIO and the head of the teacher's union and then these corporate folks and then these experts in foreign policy. There were 17 of us.

We would sit in alphabetical order. The Secretary of Labor for the Reagan administration was a gentleman by the name of Bill Brock, and he sat right next to me. A friend of mine that worked for the Department of Labor told me, he said, "Polly, Secretary Brock could just declare that farmers had to have sanitation facilities on their farms. You should talk to him."

I went to a meeting and he sat down next to me and I said, "Mr. Secretary, I'd really like your help on something. You know, we don't have sanitation facilities on farms, and if you have more than ten employees, it seems to me that for sanitation purposes, they handle our fruits and our vegetables. They should be able to go to the bathroom and wash their hands. But I can't get it through, I haven't been able to pass it." I said, "I'd like you to have an executive order that causes that to happen. Would you consider it?"

He said, "Well, that's a state issue. The states do that."

And I said, "I've introduced it twice. And then the second time I had a Republican in a house introduce it. I was introducing it in the Senate, and she in the house. And I thought maybe if it started with a Republican in the house, it would go farther. [But] we can't get it through. Could you at least look into it and see what you think?"

He said, "OK, I'll do that. I'll look into it."

It took him a year, but a year later he issued an executive order that all farms, if you had more than ten employees, you had to have sanitation facilities or port-a-potties for them. I get excited every time I think about it. I may not have been able to get it through the legislature, but I got it done anyhow.