Go Roybal High!

For the last two years we have been watching closely the construction of a new neighbor to the Chamber: a high school directly across the street from our building at the corner of Third and Bixel streets. We are excited about our new neighbor, and the new housing going up across Third. The projects will undoubtedly bring new life and vitality to the west side of the 110 Freeway in downtown Los Angeles.

We are already building a close partnership with the school through UNITE-LA and L.A. Youth at Work, the Chamber’s affiliate programs dedicated to increasing the skills of our future workforce. Through job shadowing, mentoring, a technology-focused small learning community and business-education exchanges such as Principal for a Day, we hope it will become a great example of how businesses and communities can work together to strengthen our neighborhood schools.

As we anticipate the first day of classes this fall at this school on a hill overlooking Downtown, we can think of no more appropriate decision than to name the school after one of the area’s finest opinion leaders and role models, the late Congressman Edward Roybal.

The Chamber has signed onto to an effort being led by Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) to name this school after Roybal, who, in 1949, was the first Latino to be elected to the L.A. City Council, and in 1962 became the first Hispanic member of Congress from California in the 20th century. Congressman Roybal overcame prejudice and racism to pave the way for minorities to gain acceptance in L.A. and is highly regarded as a champion for academic and economic opportunities for the Latino community.

Roybal enjoyed significant community support in his three decades in Congress. He served on various committees that made a difference for Los Angeles, including the powerful Appropriations Committee. Some of his most significant legislation included authoring the first bilingual education bill to provide local school districts assistance with special-bilingual teaching programs. In 1968, with the goal of improving educational, housing, and employment opportunities for Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens, he worked to establish a Cabinet Committee on opportunities for Spanish-speaking people. He also was instrumental in authoring legislation that provided bilingual proceedings in courts. He worked hard to outlaw discrimination of all types, focusing on age, racial and physical disabilities, and he was one of the founders of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Not only did Roybal establish a record of his own achievements, he motivated hundreds of other Hispanics to pursue public office and was a mentor to many—most especially his daughter and successor in Congress, Lucille Roybal-Allard, who now serves us with distinction in Washington.

After ABC and the Chamber presented LAUSD with our suggestion to name the new school after Ed Roybal, some members of the community suggested that a decision may have already been made to name the school after someone else. There is no public record that a decision has been made, and I certainly have not seen any public notice that a decision was pending. Others have made recommendations, and I am sure that many of these names are worthy of consideration—and I’m also sure the matter should be discussed openly in public.

As far as we are concerned, Ed Roybal’s distinguished service to our community for nearly four decades places him head and shoulders above anyone else we can think of. Because of his legacy to L.A. and Hispanics, he will be a formidable role model for the young people of our new neighborhood school. Go Roybal High!

And that’s The Business Perspective.

Russell J. Hammer
President & CEO
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce