

ACLU director Anthony Romero's Park City visit will explore 'Civil rights in an Uncivil Time'

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Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the ACLU, will present "Civil Liberties in an Uncivil Time" on Tuesday, April 3, at the Eccles Center for the Performing Arts. The event is presented by Park City Institute.

Park City Institute will present Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, at 7:30 p.m. on

Tuesday, April 3, at the Eccles Center for the Performing Arts, 1750 Kearns Blvd. Romero will give his presentation "Civil Rights in an Uncivil Time." Tickets range from \$29 to \$79. They can be purchased by visiting <http://www.ecclescenter.org>.

Although the American Civil Liberties Union is known for playing defense for many of the United State's groundbreaking cases, whether it was the Scopes Trial that gave teachers the right to teach evolution in a public science classroom, to Gideon v. Wainwright, which guaranteed the right to a court-appointed attorney, the ACLU also likes to play offense on such issues as criminal justice reform, said Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the group.

"This one of the few places where I see an affirmative opportunity to move the needle forward," Romero said. "You can build bipartisan consensus, because both liberals and conservatives agree that we incarcerate too many people for too long, and that the people who've done the crime and have done the time are given a chance to contribute to society again."

This is one of the issues Romero will address when the Park City Institute presents him on Tuesday, April 3, at the Eccles Center for the Performing Arts.

"Of all the issues we work on, this is probably the place of greatest hope for me," he said. "I think we're making enormous progress on issues around sentencing reform, better prisons, bail reform and the terms of incarcerations."

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Romero's presentation, titled "Civil Rights in an Uncivil Time," will also address the challenges the nonprofit has faced while carrying out its mission in the present day, which is "To defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States."

"This last year has been one of the most challenging for the organization, but it's also been one of the most important," Romero said. "It's especially important for us now ... to fight the battles of the moment and put up a fierce resistance to the anti-civil liberties and civil rights policies of the Trump Administration."

Some of those battles include the administration's travel ban from majority-Muslim countries, the transgender military ban, which prevents transgendered individuals from serving in the military, the efforts to strip voters of their voting rights and denying due process rights for immigrants, Romero said.

"With so many of our issues on the front burner on high boil, it makes the work even more important than ever before," he said.

With so many cases on the fire, the trick is not to get discouraged when one is lost.

"We're in the long game," said Romero, citing *Korematsu v. United States*, which questioned the constitutionality of Franklin D. Roosevelt's order to intern Japanese-Americans during World War II.

"The *Korematsu* case was brought by the ACLU of California in 1941," Romero said. "We lost that case in the Supreme Court in 1944, even though we were right, and we had to work for more than 40 years to gain reparations for the Japanese-American internees."

The fight paid off, and President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. In signing the bill, Reagan called the internment a "grave wrong" and granted redress of \$20,000 to each surviving internee.

"We must also not get discouraged, so I keep telling my staff, board, members and donors that the ACLU has been around for nearly 100 years, and we'll be around for another 100 if we do our jobs right," he said. "We will stay on the issues like water on stone."

The two primary venues where the ACLU makes a difference are in the courts and in the streets, according to Romero.

"The courts have to be key protagonists in the defense of civil liberties and civil rights," he said. "We file many cases, and we'll file a case when we think the issue is important and when we think righteousness is on our side."

When the ACLU suffers a loss, like it recently did with *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, where the Supreme Court overturned a ruling requiring immigrants who are detained for more than six months be given a hearing, Romero and his staff regroup and reassess.

"We're going back to the drawing board to see how we can follow up in the lower courts and what additional cases we can bring in, as well as facts and circumstances we can use to distinguish the loss from some of the other efforts," he said. "Giving up is not an option."

Deciding on which cases to take is also an important step for the ACLU, Romero said.

"We have offices in every state," said Romero. "The types of cases vary from state to state, depending on the politics and demographics ... but we want to bring in cases that appeal to the middle of the political spectrum, or right of center, because we want to convince judges who may not be liberals or Democrats, but who are Republicans and conservatives, about the validity of our arguments."

As far as taking the ACLU to the streets, Romero sees progress.

"What is the remarkable about this period is the American public is paying much closer attention to issues, whether it's the Women's Marches, or the (fight for the) Dreamers or the students who are fighting for gun control, than they have before," he said. "There is an energy and dynamism that is coming out of citizen activism. Part of our job is to find how to sustain, direct and encourage that."

This is why the ACLU launched a member mobilization program called People Power last year, where the nonprofit's volunteers work with communities to "give ordinary folk in their local communities an opportunity to be engaged in the fight for civil liberties and civil rights," Romero said.

The reward for all of the work is knowing the efforts are making a difference.

"The people who populate the ACLU — staff, volunteers, board members or contributors — are all, by and large, altruists," Romero said. "They want to make the world a better place. We are fortunate to have jobs where we read something in the newspaper or watch something on TV and ask, 'what we can do about this,' when we get to the office."