



**The 2004 LULAC Challenge:**  
**A Latino Public Policy Agenda**  
**for Electoral Candidates**

---

Presented by the  
**League of United Latin American Citizens**

Washington, D.C.  
January 2004

### **League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**

The Mission of the League of United Latin American Citizens is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.

LULAC seeks to increase the number of Hispanics serving in appointed and career positions within the Federal government at all levels.

THE LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS

**National Office**

**2004**

**Hector M. Flores, LULAC National President**  
**Brent Wilkes, Executive Director**  
**Dr. Gabriela D. Lemus, Director of Policy and Legislation**  
**2000 L Street NW, Suite 610**  
**Washington, DC 20036**  
**202/833-6130**  
**202/833-6135 (Fax)**

**[www.LULAC.org](http://www.LULAC.org)**

***Acknowledgements***

This policy brief was compiled and edited by Gabriela D. Lemus, LULAC National Director of Policy and Legislation. LULAC wishes to express its special thanks to Lydiana Alfaro, Susana Carranza, and Dora Lopez for their invaluable contributions and comments. The “2004 Challenge” could not have been made without them.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Who are we?.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The 2004 LULAC Challenge.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Policy Implications.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>LULAC’s Top 10 Issues Important to the Community.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Education.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>Civil Rights and Justice.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>Political Access.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>Economic Power.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>Immigrant Rights.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<b>Environment.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>Housing.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>Health.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<b>Learning English.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<b>Women’s Issues.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Challenge.....</i>	<i>25</i>

## **Introduction**

In the 2000 Presidential Election Census Bureau Reports, the number of Hispanic voters increased by approximately 20 percent. This voter increase reflected the growth and strength of the rapidly growing Hispanic population. The Latino vote has clearly become a pivotal factor for political elections across the country, especially that of the presidency.

As we face the 2004 electoral cycle, the Latino population has undoubtedly become the largest minority group, comprising 13.3 percent of the entire U.S. population. The most recent census data indicate that one in eight people in the United States are of Hispanic origin. It is inevitable then that with such high demographics, Latinos stand at the cusp of playing an even greater role politically, translating sheer numbers into votes.

Over the past few years, politicians have begun to recognize the political influence of the community and now target the Latino vote. However, the Latino community requires more than just Spanish-speaking candidates—we need policies that work for us. Hispanic participation at the polls will have a decisive influence on who becomes an elected official in the coming electoral cycle. Because of this potential impact the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a non-partisan Latino civil rights organization, has developed *The 2004 LULAC Challenge: A Latino Public Policy Agenda for Electoral Candidates*. The purpose of this challenge is to inform candidates running for public office about what issues matter most to us. More importantly, we are challenging candidates to explain their position on what we have determined to be the top ten crucial issues affecting the Latino community.

## **Who are we?**

The March 2002 US Census revealed that Hispanics currently comprise 13.3 percent of the total population of the United States, or 37.4 million people. The census data also revealed that nearly one half of Latinos live in either the Far West or Southwest, and half of these live in California (11.0 million) and Texas (6.7 million or 32 percent of the state's population). Approximately 35 percent (12.8 million) of Latinos are under the age

of 18 years, compared to 25.7 percent of the entire US population. By the year 2030, Latino school-aged children (ages 5-18) are projected to number almost 16 million, 25 percent of the total U.S. school population.

Latinos are already the largest ethnic group in such cities as Los Angeles, New York City, Dallas, and Houston—In Houston alone, Latinos account for 37.4 percent of the population. And still more we are seeing Latino migration to cities in the Midwest where there had only been a slight handful of Latinos before.

Our Latino population is diverse. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are the largest subgroup constituting about 67 percent of the total Latino population, Puerto Ricans constitute 8.6 percent; Cubans constitute 3.7 percent; and 14.3 percent of Latinos come from Central, South America.

## **The 2004 LULAC Challenge**

Despite the growth in our numbers, the Latino community continues to face serious and ongoing challenges as we seek to realize our full economic, political, and social potential. While there is a rise in the Latino middle class with an annual purchasing power of \$600 billion and an 83.7 percent increase in Hispanic-owned businesses from 1987 to 1993, Latinos still do not enjoy equal access and opportunity to advance and contribute to the overall welfare of the nation.

- Twenty-eight percent of the nation's Latino children live in families with incomes below the poverty line, which is more than triple the number of white non-Hispanic children. These youth are eight times more likely to drop out of school than children from families with a higher income.
- On average, the wage premium, associated with education, has risen over time. In 1999, Hispanic males who completed a college degree earned 146 percent more than Hispanic men who had not completed high school. Yet, the high school completion rate for Hispanics is only 63 percent – in comparison to 88 percent for non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. The relatively low levels of Hispanic earnings are explained in large measure by lower levels of educational attainment.

- Latinos represent 35 percent or 11 million of the 43 million people lacking health insurance. Most low-wage workers, many of whom are Latinos, are far less likely to be offered health insurance benefits at the workplace. For instance two thirds (63%) of Latinos who do not have health insurance are currently employed. Consequently, these individuals are far less likely to receive preventive health care, be treated for injuries, or have to choose between health care and paying for basic necessities.
- Although Hispanics comprise only 13.3 percent of the population, we account for 20 percent of new HIV infections and 18 percent of deaths from AIDS. This is particularly prevalent in the Border States.
- Latinos are twice as likely to develop type-2 diabetes as non-Hispanic whites, and are more likely to receive more invasive procedures, such as amputations, because their illnesses have been neglected longer. One in 10 Latinos has diabetes, of which approximately 24 percent are Mexican Americans, 26 percent are Puerto Ricans, and nearly 16 percent are Cubans.
- Latinos are more likely to live in inadequate housing. According to studies by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), more than half of all Latinos seeking to purchase a home are treated differently than whites with similar qualifications and income. Only 48.1 percent of native-born Hispanics are homeowners, compared to 65.4 percent of all nationwide. In the Texas-Mexico border region, there are over 1,800 “colonias” or subdivisions that developed without services such as running, potable water or sewers.
- According to the Department of Labor, one-third of Latino workers do not participate in private pension plans – the highest of any group. Two-thirds of 66 percent of Hispanic workers reported that they have not received employer-provided retirement education materials in the past 12 months, and only 14 percent of Latino workers cited employer funded plans as a source of retirement income.
- Although violent crimes against Latinos decreased by 56 percent in the 1990s, according to a recent DOJ report, the Hispanic murder rate remained about 50 percent higher than the national average, or 9.1 Latino victims per 100,000 people. Accordingly, adolescent Latino males were 77 percent more likely to die from homicide than whites.
- Latino communities, and youth in particular, are increasingly singled out by the criminal justice system. According to Building Blocks for Youth, Latino youth in Los Angeles are arrested 2.3 times more often than white non-Hispanic youth. Latino youth were prosecuted as adults 2.4 times as often as white non-Hispanic youth and imprisoned 7.3 times more often than white non-Hispanic youth for similar offenses. There are more young Latino males in the penal system than in the school system.

- Roughly 80 percent of all migrant children are Latino. Migration, extreme poverty, and isolation from “mainstream” communities make these children the most at-risk and vulnerable students in our public education system. Virtually all, migrant children live in poverty. Only 40 percent of migrant children’s parents have completed the eighth-grade. More than one in six migrant students are behind a grade level with the rate increasing as the students reach the upper grades. Migrant students have drop out rates between 50 and 60 percent.

## **Policy Implications**

All of these issues are important to all Latinos. The current state of Hispanic education, health care, border safety, dearth of affordable housing, and need for economic opportunities – among other issues – have reached a critical level. Latinos are concerned: the population is growing, but the services needed to assist Latino communities are not placed at the top of the public policy agenda. This is the purpose of *The 2004 LULAC Challenge*.

We challenge candidates running for elected office nation-wide to outline their responses to improve the quality of life for all Latino men, women, children, and the elderly – whether citizen, legal resident, or undocumented. We are placing them on notice that their decisions and answers will be scrutinized. We will vote for those candidates who not only make promises, but also show a clear action plan for how to address our needs and concerns.

## **LULAC’s Top 10 Issues Important to the Community**

Although there are many issues that impact the Hispanic community, we have selected ten major issue areas where it is clear that Latinos clearly trail dangerously behind or lack serious access. Below we have outlined a set of 10 issue areas that we feel are most important to Hispanic communities nation-wide. The issues are in no particular order. However, LULAC stands behind education as being our most pressing concern. Through education we see the cornerstone for economic, social, and political success.

## **LULAC Top 10 Issues**

- |                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1) Education              | 6) Environment      |
| 2) Civil Rights & Justice | 7) Housing          |
| 3) Political Access       | 8) Health           |
| 4) Economic Power         | 9) Learning English |
| 5) Immigrant Rights       | 10) Women's Issues  |

*The 2004 LULAC Challenge* cannot cover all the issues affecting Latinos across the country, but it is indicative of some of the more pressing issues that are relevant to public policy. LULAC believes that those who administer our local, state, and national governments must understand the need to invest in our communities and to adequately consider our issues, and prioritize them when it comes to the decision-making process. This challenge is timely and relevant considering the continued rapid growth and strength of the Latino population across the nation.

## **EDUCATION**

Education is probably the most important issue facing the Latino community. In 2001, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) released a report pointing out that segregation still exists in U.S. schools and current trends indicate that it is widespread. In all regions of the country, Latino segregation has increased fairly consistently since 1968. Since 1980, Hispanic children have been more likely to attend predominantly minority schools than African American children. Whereas in 1968-69 school year 42 percent of Latino children in western states attended predominantly minority schools, by 2001 the Harvard Civil Rights Project study determined that percentage to have risen to about 80 percent. In addition, 70 percent of all Latino children attended large, overcrowded schools located in highly urbanized and economically depressed areas. The ETS report also indicates that the higher a school's concentration of economically impoverished students, the higher the incidence of low academic achievers. It was found that over one quarter of Hispanic children under the age of 18 live in poverty (US Census Bureau 2002).

One third of the Latino population is under the age of 18. The school and college aged population, ages 5 to 24, make up 37 percent of the Hispanic population and over the next 25 years is projected to increase by 82 percent (Projections by the PEW Hispanic Center 2004). One in five Hispanics in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 enrolled in American schools is left without either a high school diploma or an alternative certificate, such as a GED (US Census Bureau 1998). Hispanics had the highest dropout rate in the 2000 US Census, which reached 21.1 percent. Given this situation of crisis proportions we must challenge the country to secure the future of our young people and of the United States. In 2001 there were 8.1 million Latinos enrolled in public schools (The Civil Rights Project Harvard University). Although Hispanic children are the largest minority group in America's schools today, they lag behind non-Hispanics in almost all categories of education.

The numbers are alarming. Hispanics remain the most likely to drop out, the most likely to be found in large, urban, impoverished schools, and the least likely to enroll in college. Also of great concern, according to the 2000 Issues Conference Policy Recommendations Report of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, there are more male Hispanic children of school-going age in detention and penal institutions than are enrolled in school and other educational programs.

## **The Challenge**

- According to the 2000 US Census, high school dropout rates for Latino children ages 16-19 range at about 21 percent. What concrete actions does the candidate plan to undertake to lower high dropout rates in the Latino community?
- Undocumented young adults are generally unable to attend universities because they cannot apply for scholarships or grants, and because they are required to pay more expensive, out of state tuition. When considering this educational concern, how does the candidate plan to address the issue of acquiring US citizenship? Will the candidate endorse the currently proposed Dream Act? Why or why not?

- Most Latino students attend schools that cannot afford enough books for all their students, offer advanced placement courses, or other college preparatory courses. How does the candidate plan to remedy these concerns?
- What is the candidate's position on vouchers? Why?
- How do you feel about the **No Child Left Behind** Legislation? Do you feel it has been an adequate measure to improve our children's education system? Why or why not?
- How does the candidate plan to address the need for education of the large number of Latino children that have been expelled or incarcerated in a juvenile detention facility?
- Migrant children, especially in rural areas, require special considerations. What does the candidate recommend in order to ensure that these children receive a quality education?
- Considering that seventy percent of Latino children attend poor, dilapidated, urban schools, how will the candidate address the need for capital improvements to our public schools?
- Access to technology is essential to the economic growth of the Latino community. How does the candidate propose to bridge the digital divide? What policies and resource allocation does the candidate propose to ensure the Latino community access to technology and information to enhance children's opportunities?
- With low Latino enrollment in higher education and with nearly half of all Hispanic higher education students attending federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), which tend to be located near or in the communities with large Latino populations. How does the candidate plan to ensure that Latino students are encouraged to receive a higher education and HSIs receive adequate support?

## **CIVIL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE**

As the oldest Latino civil rights organization in the United States, LULAC has a long history of promoting the fundamental freedoms, liberties, and protections endowed by the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Yet, Hispanics continue to suffer discrimination:

in employment, the criminal justice system, education, and access to health benefits. These concerns have increased since September 11<sup>th</sup>. We are currently witnessing the erosion of civil rights as they pertain to such issues as racial profiling and illegal detention. Furthermore, anti-immigrant organizations have exploited this terribly trying situation, by promoting an agenda that would establish English as the official language of the United States. This policy could potentially create a hostile environment for immigrants that might limit, if not completely curtail the entrance and movement of immigrants in the U.S.

Furthermore, recent legal opinions like that of the Department of Justice that allow local law enforcement officers to assist the United States Citizenship Immigration Services (USCIS), formerly known as Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), to enforce national immigration law, along with the potential militarization of the US-Mexico border, raise red flags. In the past, attempts by local law enforcement to enforce immigration law have had detrimental effects on the Latino community. This decision would reverse a long-standing federal policy to separate enforcement of civil immigration laws and criminal laws. It also would divert local law enforcement officials from their responsibilities to the communities, which they serve. Finally, it would discourage Latinos and immigrants from turning to the police for service because the likelihood for racial profiling increases.

Latino communities and Latino youth, in particular, are increasingly targeted by the criminal justice system. Latinos face harsh and disparate treatment at all stages of the justice system, from the time the police stop, detain, arrest, and sentence them. Additionally, some police officers practice racial profiling, which creates resentment and distrust of law enforcement in Latino communities. Based on the perception that law enforcement is biased, unfair, or disrespectful, Latinos are generally less inclined to trust and report crimes or even actively participate in crime investigations.

Latino youth are particularly hard-hit. According to the Building Blocks for Youth, racial and ethnic disparities in the system are compounded by the unprecedented rate of at

which new juvenile facilities, jails and prisons are being constructed across the country. Furthermore, what research and data is available, strongly indicate that Latino youth receive harsher treatment and sentencing than white youth who are charged with the same offenses. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute 2000 Issues Conference reported more male school-age Hispanic children are in detention and penal institutions than are enrolled in school.

## **The Challenge**

- Does the candidate support efforts to eliminate racial profiling in the Latino community? What actions would the candidate take should he/she be elected to end racial profiling?<sup>1</sup> What is the candidate's position on community-based policing?
- Perceptions are equally important in dealing with racial profiling problems. Even if a local or state law enforcement agency were operating lawfully, many in the Latino community refuse to engage with them. What does the candidate propose to eliminate distrust between communities of color and the law enforcement officers, who protect them?
- Does the candidate support legislation for tougher punishment against hate crimes, excessive use of force, and racial profiling against the Latino community and other targeted populations?
- Does the candidate support the adjustment of outdated policies and legislation that do not accurately reflect the changing demographics, nor the varied nature of hate crimes and/or racial-ethnic bigotry? If so, what actions does the candidate propose to alleviate these concerns?
- What actions does the candidate support to remove barriers to access and end segregation in housing, schools, and health facilities?
- Does the candidate support funding programs for integration, dialogue, civil rights training and counseling programs to end racial profiling, discrimination, and hate?

---

<sup>1</sup> Racial profiling is defined by the Department of Justice as any police-initiated action that relies on the race, ethnicity, or national origin rather than the behavior of an individual or information that leads the police to a particular individual who has been identified as being, or having been, engaged in criminal activity.

- How does the candidate plan to address the disproportionate incarceration and problems that Latino youth encounter in every stage of the criminal justice system?
- What initiatives does the candidate propose to address the challenges faced by youth and young adults, particularly on college campuses where we are witnessing an increasing trend of hate violence?
- How does the candidate plan to improve race and ethnic relations across America?
- What proposals does the candidate have to ensure accountability of local and state law enforcement practices to address all aforementioned issues?

## **POLITICAL ACCESS**

Although Latinos have made some political progress, the community continuously fails to recognize the potential of our full political clout. Latino political strength is increasing in voter registration according to The Almanac of Latino Politics 2002-2004, which recorded Latino voter registration from 1972-2000 increased 202 percent compared to 27 percent for the general population. Furthermore, Latino voter turnout increased 182 percent compared to 25 percent for the general population. Although Latinos made up about 13 percent of the U.S. Population, they only accounted for 5 percent of voters in the 2000 presidential election.

### **The Challenge**

- What will the candidates do to ensure that Latinos achieve their proportional representation at all levels of government?
- What are the candidates' plans to ensure that electoral integrity be maintained in your state as prescribed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965?
- What types of legislative, judicial, and educational efforts does the candidate propose to promote voter participation overall and in the Hispanic community?
- How does the candidate intend to improve access to the ballot box and to avoid problems witnessed in Florida during the 2000 presidential elections?

## **ECONOMIC POWER**

Latino purchasing power is estimated to have reached \$600 billion annually as of August 2003. According to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute 2000 Policy Recommendations, by the middle of the century, Latinos will represent an estimated 50 percent of the total ethnic population in the United States with an approximate purchasing power of between \$2-\$3 trillion dollars. Between 1987 and 1997, Hispanic owned businesses increased by an astounding 23 percent per year. Nevertheless, the Hispanic business community requires greater access and participation in procurement programs at all levels of government and in the private sector. Hispanic businesses need equity capital in order to grow.

The incorporation of Latino labor in the U.S. market has responded largely to the transformation of the national economy. Many Latino immigrants perform jobs that no one else in the United States wishes to do, particularly in the service industries. This was reflected in President Bush's immigration proposal that highlighted U.S. dependence on foreign labor. The combination of the 2001 recession in conjunction with the events of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks led to a wide-scale loss of jobs in the Latino community. Consequently, second generation Latinos are now experiencing high unemployment. Young adults, products of U.S. schools, are experiencing high unemployment, concentrated in the manufacturing, retail trade, as well as in the hospitality and transportation sectors.

Due to work-related disease and occupational injuries, Latinos suffer the largest number of work-place injuries and deaths. The Department of Labor reported that workplace fatalities among Hispanics rose from 1992 to 2002 by 57 percent. At least 840 Latinos died on the job in 2002. The reasons are varied: more often Latinos take dangerous jobs; experience language barriers; have limited safety training; and if undocumented, fear deportation if they complain.

## **The Challenge**

- How does the candidate propose to increase Latino presence in procurement programs for federal, state, and local governments, as well as in the private sector?
- In 2002, the poverty rate for Hispanics was 21.2 percent, three times higher than the poverty rate of non-Hispanic whites. How does the candidate propose to assist Latino families to improve their economic status and standards of living?
- Does the candidate support raising the minimum wage to a living wage thus allowing persons earning minimum wage to support themselves and their families?
- Capital is not readily available to facilitate the growth and development of Hispanic and minority businesses. How does the candidate plan to improve access to capital, particularly in low and moderate-income communities?
- Work-related fatalities in the Hispanic community have reached an unprecedented number. How does the candidate propose to address the issue of unsafe workplaces, as well as hold employers accountable?
- Many Latino workers are not paid for their work. What concrete proposals does the candidate offer to ensure that Hispanic workers can assert their rights in the workplace, including whistle-blower protection?

## **IMMIGRANT RIGHTS**

Currently there is growing attention towards guest worker programs due to the large numbers of undocumented workers who desperately seek our shores. Nearly 40.2 percent of 37.4 million Latinos in the United States are foreign-born. The United States economy thrives upon the immigrant workforce.

Along with the recent attention aimed at immigration rights there is also a strong backlash against immigrants through vocal offensives launched by restrictionist organizations such as the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR), Pro-English, and Voices of Citizens Together (VCT). These organizations prey upon the fears of average citizens and the vulnerabilities of politicians who wish to be re-elected. Targeting foreigners has a negative impact on the Latino community, as incidents of

discrimination, racial profiling, abuse, and other violations seem to be increasing. Yet, nearly 70 percent of all Latinos are U.S. citizens either by birth or naturalization.

In recent years, immigrants who are not yet citizens are looked upon as having fewer rights under the constitution and Bill of Rights than U.S. citizens. Furthermore, local agencies are increasingly being engaged in efforts to control immigration. In addition, laws passed in the '90s placed strong constraints limiting the rights and well being of Latino immigrants who pay taxes and contribute to the national economy. It has become much more difficult to begin the pathway towards U.S. citizenship as barriers have been raised, such as the three- and ten-year bars to legal admission for undocumented aliens.

On March 27, 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Hoffman Plastic Compounds vs. National Labor Relations Board that undocumented workers do not have the right to back pay when dismissed for union organizing. This decision seemed like an attempt to subvert U.S. labor laws to immigration laws, by effectively weakening the power of labor unionization. Currently, undocumented workers have been prevented from seeking legal assistance when filing a claim against an unscrupulous employer. Such a decision increases the potential for exploitation of immigrant workers.

Approximately 50 percent of U.S. farm workers feeding the nation and ensuring the continuity of the food security chain are foreign born Latinos. Many growers and employers continue to take advantage of the vulnerable condition of farm workers and are pressing for expanded guest worker programs with few, if any protections, despite the large pools of work-authorized farm workers who remain unemployed, particularly in such places as Southern California. Farm workers have been further hard hit as programs such as the National Farmworker Job Training Program known as WIA 167 are being eliminated from the 2003 Department of Labor (DOL) budget. These programs provide job training and support services to 5.1 million farm workers in this country.

Although the recent immigration proposals under the current administration finally came to reengage immigration reform efforts, there still lacks a serious path towards earned

legalization. Earned legalization is a critical amendment we feel is essential for any immigration reform to truly aid the Latino community. We must allow those immigrants who want to make a lifetime commitment to the United States to do so rather than require them to stay in a temporary worker status that only values their labor, not their loyalty to our country.

## **The Challenge**

- What does the candidate consider to be the cornerstone of U.S. national immigration policy?
- Do you feel that there needs to be a comprehensive immigration reform plan that includes earned legalization?
- As it stands what is your take on the current administrations immigration plan? Do you feel there needs to be amendments made and if so what are those modifications?
- Does the candidate support the periodic update of the registry date in order to incorporate segments of the immigrant population who have lived for many years in the United States, raising their families, contributing to the economy, and paying their taxes?
- Although this is a federal issue, how does the candidate propose to ensure that immigration policy remain fair and equitable, and treats immigrants with respect?
- What does the candidate propose to do in his/her state, to ensure that America's agricultural workers be provided with the services that they need and not be made vulnerable to the exploitation of unscrupulous employers?
- How does the candidate propose to make sure that immigration enforcement is accountable and does not violate human and civil rights, particularly on the part of local law enforcement involvement in his/her state?

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Environmental justice is a critical issue for Latino communities. Latino communities are disproportionately impacted because of local and state governments' tendencies to locate

environmentally damaging or dangerous sites in Hispanic and other disadvantaged communities, as well as to place plants in charge of the disposal of nuclear or chemical waste near Hispanic communities.

While air pollution is a health risk faced by all Americans, health advocates and experts indicate that poor Latino communities carry the burden of the greatest risk. A recent report by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Equity Workgroup stated that, "Racial minority and low-income populations experience higher than average exposures to selected air pollutants, hazardous waste facilities, contaminated fish, and agricultural pesticides in the workplace."

According to the American Lung Association, industrial and electricity generating facilities are disproportionately concentrated in Hispanic neighborhoods and are major sources of harmful air pollution. Of all the U. S. counties considered urban, 12 percent had minority populations of greater than 31 percent. However, these areas contain 21 percent of the 3,000 major air-polluting facilities in the nation.

Data also indicate that Latinos are disproportionately represented in districts failing to meet national standards for clean air. In addition, while 33 percent of non-Hispanic whites were found to live in areas that exceeded federal health standards for two or more pollutants, 60 percent of Latinos lived in these areas. Even greater differences were found for areas that violate air quality standards for three and four pollutants.

Environmental risks for Hispanic children also include labor-related factors. In interviews conducted with Mexican American farm-worker youths in New York State, for example, 48 percent reported having worked in fields with pesticides and 36 percent reported being sprayed with pesticides either directly or by drift while working in fields or orchards, resulting in chronic conditions such as asthma.

## The Challenge

- How does the candidate plan to address the clean up of “brownfields” in primarily Hispanic neighborhoods?
- Does the candidate support ensuring that environmentally damaging or hazardous waste sites are not created near Hispanic neighborhoods?
- How does the candidate propose to deal with the hazardous materials that already exist?
- How does the candidate intend to improve the quality of both air and water in the Latino communities?
- How does the candidate plan to address chronic conditions associated with detrimental environmental conditions?
- What measures does the candidate propose to reduce pesticide run-off?
- How does the candidate plan to protect Latino children, namely those working in the fields, from exposure to dangerous pesticides and other chemicals?

## HOUSING

While the issue of housing availability for Latinos appears positive, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the report, *Barriers To Minority Homeownership*, based on updated statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau. The report indicates that only small gains have been made in Hispanic home ownership, an increase of only 1.8 percent since 1994. As it stood in the recent Pew Hispanic 2002 National Survey of Latinos, only four out of ten (40%) of Latinos reported owning their own home in comparison to the seven out of ten whites.

Latinos are a relatively young population. This factor negatively impacts home ownership rates, as homeownership is generally lower in younger populations. Although many Latinos are legal residents, not all have achieved U.S. citizenship. This factor constitutes a barrier on two levels: first, newcomers to the United States are not yet as familiar with American financial systems and credit acquisition processes, and second, certain banks refuse to provide financing to non-U.S. citizens.

Many Latinos encounter limitations when accessing the housing and mortgage markets. Mortgage approval rates for Latinos (58.6 percent) lag behind those of non-Hispanic whites. According to the Washington DC Civil Rights Review Panel, Latino immigrants suffer from outright discrimination, because of banks' and lenders' failure to recognize the unique needs and financial practices of the Latino community. Latinos seeking mortgage loans are subject to discrimination in 48 percent of their encounters with lenders.

While it has not yet caused wide-scale problems, predatory lending is an additional problem facing the Hispanic community and the potential exists for problematic results. In addition, there are discriminatory barriers facing Latinos in accessing the best types of loans. Latino home buyers are being steered toward more expensive government loans such as FHA, VA and FmHA products.

## **The Challenge**

- How does the candidate propose to ensure that lenders and real estate agents engaging in discrimination against Latinos – whether outright refusing to conduct business with the community or steering them into government loans - are penalized and prevented from doing so?
- How does the candidate prevent predatory lending practitioners from targeting the Latino community?
- How does the candidate plan to generate affordable housing and safe neighborhoods for members of the Latino community?
- How does the candidate propose to accurately represent Latinos when addressing the issue of expanding credit-scoring factors?

## **HEALTH**

According to 2002 Institute of Medicine report to Congress, access to quality health care is a problem for the vast majority of Latinos. Lack of insurance coverage, poor quality of

care at public facilities, inconsistent relationships with primary health care providers, language barriers, and under-representation in national research programs threaten to harm the health and well being of a majority of Hispanics.

Latinos are less likely to have health insurance because their low wage jobs do not include health benefits. Latinos accounted for about 35 percent of the 44 million people without insurance. Although many Latinos live below the poverty line, they are not all entitled to Medicaid coverage because they are undocumented. Confusion regarding the 1996 immigration reform created problems for legal residents and their children, as well by making it unclear who was entitled to benefits. Even those Latinos, who are insured at the same levels as whites, are less likely to have a “consistent” relationship with their primary care providers, leading to poorer care. Latinos are also more likely to receive less desirable procedures, than non-Hispanic whites.

Latinos are at a greater risk to contract Hepatitis C, Diabetes 2, cervical, colorectal and lung cancer. Latinos represent 13.3 percent of the population, yet they account for 20 percent new HIV infections and 17 percent of deaths related to AIDS. The prevalence of AIDS in the Hispanic community is three times higher than among non-Hispanic whites. The impact on states bordering Mexico has been particularly strong.

According to the 2002 Survey of New Medicines in Development for Major Diseases Affecting Hispanic Americans, Mexican Americans are particularly at risk of experiencing strokes. Mexican Americans between the ages of 45 and 59 are three times more likely to have a stroke than non-Hispanic whites. Furthermore, the survey documented that Mexican Americans appear to have high levels of “bad” (LDL) cholesterol similar to those of non-Hispanic whites, higher levels of triglycerides, and lower levels of “good” (HDL) cholesterol factors that increase the likelihood for heart disease.

Latinos are not sufficiently represented in clinical research trials, health care assessments, and have little access to telemedicine. Furthermore, there is an apparent lack of methodology for monitoring disease in the Hispanic community.

## **The Challenge**

- How does the candidate propose to address disparities in accessing health care for Latinos?
- Does the candidate support universal health coverage? If not, how does the candidate plan to address the problem of low or inadequate health insurance coverage in the Latino community?
- What is the candidate's course of action regarding HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and testing in the Hispanic community, particularly concerning at risk youth, women, and gay men?
- What is the candidate's strategy to gain access to prescription drugs, vaccinations, and medicines for the treatment of chronic and life-threatening diseases prevalent in the Latino community?
- How does the candidate propose to bolster preventative measures in preempting illnesses associated with environmental causes?

## **LEARNING ENGLISH**

The 2000 US Census reported that 28 million US residents age five and over spoke Spanish at home and Spanish speakers constituted a ratio of more than one in ten residents. This is in comparison to the 1990 US Census that accounted for 17 million Spanish speakers, a growth of an additional eleven million Spanish speakers. Invariably, the issue of English-language acquisition is a victim of demagoguery and politics. Limited English proficiency (LEP) is a problem that affects children and adults in the Hispanic community.

The debate intensifies when considering bilingual education issues. In 1998, California passed Proposition 227 to replace bilingual education with all-English "immersion"

programs. Test scores apparently improved, however, a variety of reports indicate that the scores did not necessarily improve as a result of the proposition, but because of other strong indicators such as class size reduction and focus on the problem largely contributed to the improved scores. Few schools in the United States are prepared to cope with the special needs of LEP students. Inconsistencies in teaching methodologies, lack of political will on the part of school boards and a concentration of Hispanic/Latino or native speakers of Spanish in economically impoverished, crowded, urban schools call into question the way schools teach English.

Many LEP children live in linguistically isolated households where parents work long hours and have little time to work with them. Poverty in and of itself is not necessarily a problem for language acquisition; it only becomes one when the family lives in isolation from other immigrants or from the mainstream. Language acquisition develops through interaction. According to a recent article in the *Washington Post*, statistics of students in such wealthy counties as Montgomery and Fairfax counties in Virginia indicate that approximately 35 percent of the students in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are U.S. citizens. In the case of Prince George and Arlington counties in Virginia, nearly 50 percent of the children in specialized classes are U.S. citizens. Harvard University has recently begun a four-year study to examine why these children are at a greater disadvantage than other American and newly arriving immigrant children.

Many of these children are practically invisible and do not have extensive family networks of more established immigrant communities. Educators acknowledge that most children can learn to speak a foreign language in one year, but becoming academically proficient in a second language generally takes at least five to seven years, especially if they do not have sufficient knowledge of a previous language. A large number of them are “alingual,” they speak neither language well.

## **The Challenge**

- Issues like bilingual education, English as a second language and English language acquisition create highly emotional reactions. How do the candidates propose to

address the importance of ensuring that US citizens who are born in this country are professionally served by their public learning institutions?

- How will the candidate prioritize the needs of LEP students in the overall scheme of education?
- Organizations such as Pro-English reject bilingual education and suggest that the English language is the only constitutional viable language. Do you support “English Only” propositions? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Many children who are U.S. citizens of immigrant parents have lead isolated lives that prevent them from participating in mainstream society and create difficulties for them to acquire any language. How does the candidate propose to educate these children to ensure that they acquire the English language?
- Does the candidate support bilingual education programs? Why? Why not?
- How does the candidate plan to address the needs of limited English proficiency (LEP) children both in terms of the allocation of resources and in the retention of well-qualified certified teachers who will teach in their field?
- Does the candidate support English Plus legislation that encourages multi-lingualism, thus enhancing economic global competitiveness?

## **WOMEN’S ISSUES**

Latinas experience some of the most severe disparities in pay equity of any population group and are more likely to take flexible, lower-waged jobs so as to ensure their ability to take care of their families. But, these jobs generally do not provide health benefits or pension plans. Latinas only earn 52 cents for every dollar earned by a man, compared to 72 cents for white non-Hispanic women. According to the National Council of La Raza’s publication *Moving Up the Economic Ladder*, Latinas receive lower wages than White non-Hispanics or African-Americans. In the 1990-1996 period, the median real wage of Latinas declined by three percent from \$330 to \$320 per week. In 1996, Latinas earned only 72 percent as much as white non-Hispanic women and 89 percent as much as African-American women. Latinas spend a higher proportion of their limited income on

household costs, medical costs, and other vital necessities. Because Latinas earn less, they save less.

Latinas are also more likely to be the primary caregiver for their family. Care giving can be economically disastrous for Latinas as they will most likely be in a position of income loss. Furthermore, Latinas are more likely to put off their own health care in favor of their family. In addition, the high cost of health care acts as a barrier to preventive measures such as regular check-ups and tests, including mammograms and pelvic exams. As a result, we are witnessing disproportionate high rates of cervical cancer and breast cancer with fatal consequences.

Latinas are three times more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic white women. The significance of this fact is that over a 35-year career, Latinas have over \$510,000 less to save or invest for retirement. Twenty-five percent of Latinas over the age of 65 live in poverty and only 26 percent of Latinas have pension coverage, compared to 39 percent of both African-American and non-Hispanic white women. Only 33 percent of Latinas have retirement income from savings or assets. As a result, social security makes up the bulk of Latinas' retirement strategy. Without Social Security, 60 percent of Latinas over the age of 65 would live in poverty. Social Security is the sole source of income for 40 percent of unmarried Latinas. Eighty-one percent of unmarried retired Latinas depend on Social Security for the majority of their retirement income.

## **The Challenge**

- Does the candidate support pay equity for women with specific review on its impact on Hispanic women?
- How does the candidate plan to address in his/her state access to affordable health care targeting Latinas? What strategy does the candidate have to address health disparities for Latinas?
- Does the candidate support increased-funding for quality affordable health care in his/her state? Does the candidate support the protection of social security benefits? If

not, what proposals does the candidate have to address the specific needs of Latinas given their low rates of retirement savings and vulnerability in old age?

- Does the candidate support the expansion of medical and family-leave legislation with pay? If not, how does the candidate propose to address the issue?
- Does the candidate support action on monitoring pensions and the protection of social security benefits?



*The 2004 LULAC Challenge:  
A Latino Public Policy Agenda  
for Electoral Candidates*

---

**League of United Latin American Citizens**

National Office  
2000 L Street, NW, Suite 610  
Washington, DC 20036  
202 833-6130 - 202 833-6135 (fax)  
[www.lulac.org](http://www.lulac.org)