


The cover features a background of three large, overlapping, curved bands in a light green color, set against a white background. The text is centered and rendered in a bold, dark blue font.

Civic Engagement Update for the Pennsylvania Latino Community

A Congreso Publication



April 1, 2007

Dear Fellow Pennsylvanians:

Thanks go to those of you who supported our work during National Advocacy Day by calling our legislators to support the efforts we made in five issue areas. We ventured into Washington, DC, alongside APM and over 200 other organizations around the country to promote the needs of Latinos across our country. Congreso specifically focused on Workforce Investment Act, the DREAM Act, Comprehensive Immigration Reform, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, and State Children's Health Insurance reauthorization. Overwhelmingly, the six legislative offices showed great interest in supporting all of the legislative measures.

We depart from federal bills in this edition of the Civic Engagement Update, as we focus on the federal and state budgets and how social service, education, and health funding will be affected for the new fiscal year cycles. Changes that affect how we serve our clients, how our children are educated, and how affordable healthcare will be to all of us in Pennsylvania.

Please continue to join us on a local level, as we are excited to support the voices of the Latino community by providing venues through which our opinions are expressed and heard. On April 5th, Congreso and The Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce are hosting a Mayoral candidate forum in which we have commitments from all of the candidates. On April 10th, Congreso is co-hosting a candidates' forum for the 7th District City Council candidates.

The 80th anniversary of the birth of Cesar Chavez has just passed. We honor him by continuing to put our voices where they will be heard, at the polls. The primary elections are around the corner, and the Presidential elections of 2008 are on the horizon. Let us continue to inspire the Latino community to participate actively in these elections and cast votes for officials who will support prosperity for all of our Latino children and families.

As always, we look forward to your partnership.

Gracias,

Nicholas Torres
President, Congreso de Latinos Unidos



Civic Engagement Update

April 1, 2007

www.congreso.net

Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community shared with community leaders around PA, staff, and other interested parties.

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Highlight: The 2008 Budgets & Effects on Pennsylvanians

Background

Yes, it's budget season. Even since the beginning of October 1, 2006, we have had an interesting start to the budget season. Since that date, our federal government had been operating on a continuing resolution until the new administration in Congress voted on February 15, 2007 to operate at Fiscal Year 2006 funding levels. This budget predicament, while not completely uncommon, happened because Congress was unable to pass a budget for the new fiscal year. Did the change in government in the November 2006, in both chambers, affect this stalemate in the budget process? Most likely, as politics and the election season certainly factor into priorities set in Congress.

At this point, you might be asking, "why should I keep reading to this dry material?" Because we are outlining funding that supports education, social services and healthcare for our country's residents. The purse strings in the federal government affect those on the state level which in turn affect local budgetary levels. The way our government decides to spend our taxpayer dollars affects every single one of us in varying ways. And as our deficit and debt get larger and war lingers on, less is available for discretionary spending, funding that provides the services many lower-income Latinos rely upon.

Federal Budget to Date

President's Bush's Budget

President Bush released his budget at the beginning of February 2007 with the US debt at \$8.6 trillion. His budget reflects increases in spending for the war in Iraq, continued tax cuts, and slashes in domestic spending. In his budget, overall domestic spending would be held below the rate of inflation (with an increase of only one percent). The budget includes many newsworthy points:

- Funding for Customs and Border Protection, would rise 36 percent, to \$8.8 billion, and a good portion of the increase would go toward adding agents to the southern border.
- He would boost funding for Pell Grants, a program supported by a bill passed by the House a couple of weeks ago.
- 44 discretionary education programs, including Even Start and some dropout prevention programs, would be eliminated.
- The Dept. of Labor's Job Training programs would be cut by more than \$1 billion.
- An 18 percent reduction in funds to provide heating assistance to 5.6 million low-income families is also included.¹
- More than 325,000 families would lose access to Food Stamps.
- Employment and Administration Programs, such as the Workforce Investment Act, would be cut by 22% or a cumulative \$887 million.²

For further analysis of the President's budget, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities has developed state-by-state tables that outline the gains or losses states will receive under the President's budget:

<http://www.cbpp.org/2-21-07bud-tables.pdf>. For example, Pennsylvania would lose \$226.4 million between 2008 and 2012 for Elementary and Secondary Education (further making it difficult to abide by the No Child Left Behind laws in place). Vocational and Adult Education would lose \$174.6 million during that same time period.

Congressional Resolutions

The House passes a Budget

Once the President releases his own budget, both chambers of Congress get a crack at developing their own. The House voted 216 to 210 on March 29 to pass a budget resolution that increases domestic appropriations

¹ Philadelphia Inquirer, February 5, 2007

² Washington Update: Development in Federal Workforce Policy, February 2007

by more than \$12 billion above this year's spending, after taking inflation into account. The budget also requires that new tax cuts or entitlement increases are paid for – either by raising revenues or cutting spending (the often quoted 'pay as you go' method). Unlike the President's budget, the House budget allows for expansions or improvements in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Food Stamps.

The Coalition on Human Needs has compared the House and Senate versions and sees the House version as preferable for lower income families. Some important highlights include:

- \$5 billion more for discretionary non-defense spending than the Senate budget for FY 2008. Domestic programs such as education, housing, public health and rehabilitation, Head Start, child care, job training, food packages for the needy, young and old, mental health and substance abuse treatment, protecting children from abuse or neglect, certain veterans services, and others are a part of this spending.
- Although organizations such as CHN have advocated for \$450 billion for these domestic programs, the House budget includes just under \$418 billion and the Senate includes about \$413 billion.
- The House and Senate versions have included a \$50 billion reserve fund to extend SCHIP (which was not included in the President's version). Advocates (including the Congressional Black Caucus) have been seeking \$60 billion to cover the costs of SCHIP across the country.³
- Provides substantially more funding over the President's budget for education, including funding for No Child Left Behind, special education, and helping students afford college.

Senate Budget Resolution

The Senate approved its budget resolution of \$2.9 trillion by a slim margin, a vote of 52-47, on March 23rd. Only two Republican Senators (both from Maine) supported the budget. One of the issues dividing the parties was the 'pay as you go' rule. The budget does not support extending tax cuts beyond their expiration in 2010. As such, Republicans contend the Democrats were in effect raising taxes.

The Senate's budget projects a surplus of \$132 billion by 2012. This surplus will be assigned to the Alternative Minimum Tax, a tax that Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the House strongly supports. This tax provides middle-class tax cuts for child tax credits, elimination of the marriage penalty, and a new 10 percent tax bracket. \$15 billion of the \$50 billion needed for SCHIP program would be taken from the surplus. Another revenue source for SCHIP would be from tobacco taxes.⁴

From here, it is hoped that Congress will be able to pass a joint House and Senate budget resolution. The final document determines how Congress will make funding and tax decisions for FY 2008. It will be left to the Appropriations Subcommittees after spring recess, to determine how the joint budget resolution (\$930 billion of discretionary spending) will be allocated. From there, the two chambers will conference to get a final budget passed by September. Hopeful? We will see; more to come.

Governor Rendell's Budget for Pennsylvania

So what does the federal budget have to do with Pennsylvania? Well, 33% of Pennsylvania's budget is derived from federal funding. Over the years the portion of the 'pie' from federal dollars, in the PA budget, has diminished, putting a greater burden on PA to maintain funding and services at appropriate levels.

Governor Rendell's proposed budget mirrors the squeeze from the federal level cuts for domestic spending. Overall, the budget for fiscal 2007-08, which begins in July 2007, would increase to a total of \$27.3 billion for discretionary funding. That's up 3.5 percent from the last budget. To fund this budget, The Governor seeks creative funding strategies, by shifting taxes – cutting property taxes for most areas of Pennsylvania other than Philadelphia, raising the sales tax across the state, increasing cigarette tax and lowering the Philadelphia wage tax. Even Democrats in the General Assembly are uncertain whether to support the budget because of the tax increases. The new government (where Democrats in the House only have a one vote majority and the Senate remains Republican by 29-21) wants to promote austere and fiscally responsible

³ Human Needs Report, Coalition on Human Needs, March 30, 2007

⁴ Human Needs Report, Coalition on Human Needs, March 30, 2007

government, and some claim any rise of taxes would counter that stance. With resistance from his own party, many doubt the budget will pass in time for the new fiscal year in July. Without the increases, the legislature is facing a projected \$1 billion deficit.

Increases in some taxes will be offset by savings in others. A \$900 million savings is projected in property taxes, of which \$199 million are already being delivered to PA seniors.⁵ Seniors will also receive funding for long-term care from the state's lottery system. As such, in the end, the Governor's budget stays just below the national average, which is 7%, according to the National Association of State Budget Officers. To compare PA with neighboring states, Delaware's proposed budget would increase 12.2% while New Jersey's would increase 11.7%.

One of the most notable provisions in the Governor's budget is the Governor Rendell's **healthcare plan** which would provide affordable health insurance for nearly 800,000 uninsured *adults* and cost \$324 million in the first year. This plan is part of the Governor's Pennsylvania Cares agenda, which includes Prescription for Pennsylvania – a multi-faceted health care reform package that targets ways to improve the quality of health care delivered throughout the commonwealth; helps to contain rising costs for employers and employees; and encourages programs promoting wellness. Cover All Pennsylvanians, which is part of the Prescription for Pennsylvania, will give small businesses that currently do not offer insurance and uninsured individuals the chance to buy affordable, basic insurance in the private market that will cover physical and behavioral health care and prescriptions. For more information on the Prescription for Pennsylvania, visit www.rxforpa.com,⁶

In terms of **education**, the Governor plans to renew the Education Accountability Block Grant of \$250 million, for proven academic programs and a 3.5% increase in K-12 education funding, 71% of which will go toward needier school districts.⁷ When asked by Congress at the UWSEPA budget briefing on March 16, 2007, Secretary Masch reported minimal increases in funding for adult education programs in the Governor's budget.

When the Governor unveiled his budget in early February, he interestingly prioritized the implementation of **stricter gun-control laws**. Noting gun violence as a public health problem, the Governor outlined increasing the penalty for possession of a stolen handgun to a felony, passing bills requiring reporting of lost or stolen handguns, and limiting purchases of handguns to one a month, all very unpopular with the General Assembly in 2006.⁸

More details on the PA Budget can be found at:

<http://www.budget.state.pa.us/budget/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=167632>

PA Cares Executive Budget & related health and human service budgets:

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/business/003675756.htm>

Dept. of Public Welfare's Budget

The budget containing many social service programs in Pennsylvania is the Department of Public Welfare's budget. In her budget address, Secretary Richman attempted to debunk some of the myths of DPW, which has lately been under great scrutiny by the House Republican Policy Committee.

Most of DPW's funding goes toward the disabled and elderly (65%). Only 7% goes toward the adults, some of whom receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Children make-up 48% of DPW's caseload, but they only receive 20% of the total funding.

Work participation has received the brunt of scrutiny, when Pennsylvania was reporting that only 7% of eligible TANF recipients were working in 2003-2004. Now the rate is at 48%, and Philadelphia's rate is 47.6%, mirroring the state average. To assist in helping TANF recipients reach self-sufficiency, in this DPW

⁵ El Hispano, February 14-20, 2007

⁶ PA Governor's Newsletter, ra-govnews@state.pa.us, March 23, 2007

⁷ "Childwatch: Speaking out for the Region's Children", PCCY, March 2007

⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, February 7, 2007

budget PA will fund a \$38 million pool to support job retention through childcare, transportation and other supports.

The budget includes a 3.4% increase for children welfare services, 3.0% increase for domestic violence services, and the launching of a new Office of Child Development and Early Learning.⁹

The House Republican Policy Committee held a hearing on welfare reform on March 5, 2007. There is a growing concern on the Committee's behalf of increased welfare expenditures and the need for welfare reform, as DPW's budget is the single largest portion of the state budget for the third consecutive year. Advocates have debunked many of the Committee's concerns, which presume that too much cash assistance is being paid to welfare recipients. Only 235,000 Pennsylvanians receive cash assistance, while 1.9 million receive medical assistance (healthcare) from DPW.

¿Y Qué?

Although very meticulous, cumbersome and bureaucratic, our governmental budgets and how they are allocated very directly affect our bottom line. Our tax dollars fund a vast array of governmental programs, many of which are needed by the Latino community.

NCLR sent a letter to the President in December 2006, asking for very specific funding requests in the federal budget. Some of the important points, which reveal priorities for Latinos include:

- One out of every three Latinos lacks health insurance, a rate higher than any other racial or ethnic group;
- Half of all Latino children in the school system are English Language Learners; and
- Nearly one in five participants in Workforce Investment Act programs is Latino and fewer than 10,000 limited English proficient individuals receive training under WIA.

The Senate Democratic Committee, led by Senate Leader Harry Reid, issued a release stating **the benefits of the Senate Budget for Hispanics**. Highlights include:

▪ **Bolster Funding for Crucial Education Programs for Latino Students**

When nearly one in five children in public schools is Hispanic, Democrats have made funding for education a key priority in the 110th Congress. The Fiscal Year 2008 Senate Budget Resolution turns away from President's proposed cuts in education and adds significant new resources for Head Start, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), the No Child Left Behind Act, and Pell grants. The Budget Resolution provides an increase in discretionary spending for education and training programs - \$9.2 billion above the President's budget.

▪ **Revitalize the Health Care of Latino Families**

More than 3.2 million Latino children lack health insurance, which represents approximately 40% of the uninsured child population. Further, approximately 50% of Latino children depend on the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The Senate provided \$50 billion in the Budget Resolution for the reauthorization of the SCHIP.

▪ **Increase Economic Prosperity**

The Budget Resolution helps ensure a prosperous Hispanic middle-class by working to eliminate unfair tax burdens on middle class Latinos and other Americans. It provides middle-class tax relief by ensuring that the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) does not hit more taxpayers over the next two years. At the same time, the resolution raises enough revenue to meet the nation's needs and put the budget on a sustainable fiscal path.

Congreso's Position

- Congreso fully supports the need to adequately fund discretionary, non-defense domestic spending. Recognizing the need to maintain funding levels for mandatory programs, Congress and the President also need to prioritize those programs over which our government has full discretion in funding. These are programs that keep our children and families safe and healthy, while giving needed supports so that families eventually reach self-sufficiency. We encourage discussions on the state, federal and even local levels with our officials so they understand the need to prioritize Latino families.

⁹ DPW Budget Update, Secretary Richman address at UWSEPA, March 16, 2007

Immigration

1. The **STRIVE (Security through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy Act of 2007)** was introduced in the House of Representatives by sponsors Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) in March. This bill is quite different from the 2006 HR4437 bill, as it is a visibly more comprehensive approach to federal immigration reform. 7 Democrats, 7 Republicans and the entire Hispanic Caucus have sponsored the bill. The Senate is still negotiating their version of a bill, and Senate Leader Harry Reid has set aside the 2nd week of May for debate on immigration legislation in the Senate.

Highlights of the STRIVE bill include:

- Securing the border through highly-technical means;
- Internal enforcement of traffickers and falsifiers;
- Secure IDs for a new worker program;
- A process allowing 400,000 visas per year, which last initially for three years, for workers to come to the US. Workers can reapply for a 3 year extension, and the visa is transportable, so that workers can change employers during the time on their visas;
- Eligibility for legalization if arrived in the U.S. before June 1, 2006;
- A petition process for worker to have family members join them;
- A Path to Earned Citizenship (not amnesty) after fingerprints and criminal backgrounds are checked, a \$500 fine is paid (for a visa/ work permit), back taxes are paid; mandatory civics and English language requirements; and a \$1,500 fine is paid to apply for permanent residency;
- A touchback provision, requiring those on visas to leave the country and return, no matter how long (even one day) and what country they go to;
- Intended elimination of backlogs due to the increase in visas;
- More sensible due process than the provisions in S2611, which passed the Senate in 2006; and
- Inclusion of AgJobs and the DREAM Act.

In a national conference call last week, Rep. Gutierrez stated that they need 100 co-sponsors by the end of April. They will have to have bi-partisan support in order for the legislation to pass. The Dominican American National 2.

Roundtable (DANR), NCLR and Speaker Nancy Pelosi have stated optimism for the introduction of STRIVE. Additional coverage on the bill can be seen at:

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/tx/4650649.html>

http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-immig21mar21,1,2381449.story?coll=la-news-a_section

The National Council of La Raza's reaction to the bill:

<http://www.nclr.org/content/news/detail/44866/>

The National Immigration Forum has provided summaries of the bill:

a four-page overview of the bill here:

http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PolicyWire/Legislation/110/STRIVE_Overview.pdf

a longer 12-page summary here:

http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PolicyWire/Legislation/110/STRIVE_Summary.pdf

Once the Senate introduces a bill, the two proposed bills each must go through the Judiciary Committees of their respective chamber, where they will be "marked up" (amended). Then there will be a debate, with amendments, on the floor of the House and Senate. The hope still is to have a bill passed in the Senate and House by summer, so that both Chambers can have their work completed by the August recess and to spend the fall in Conference. If not, the Presidential election season, which is starting to heat up, might push meaningful reform to the back burner.

2. **President Bush visited Latin America**, including Mexico, in March 2007. During his visit to Mexico, **President Calderon spoke of the necessity to invest in job and industry in Mexico to stem to flow of undocumented workers** to the US. He accused the US and the President of creating the wrong solution, by passing the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which provides for 700 miles of fencing along the southern US border. Instead President Calderon reiterated that investment for just "one kilometer of road in Mexico would do more to stem illegal immigration than 10 kilometer of walls at the border."¹²

¹⁰ NCLR APPLAUDS INTRODUCTION OF "CITIZENSHIP PROMOTION ACT OF 2007", Press Release, March 7, 2007

¹¹ Impacto, E3 Vol. 93, March 8-14, 2007

¹² Mexican leader chastises Bush, Philadelphia Inquirer, March 14, 2007

Immigration (continued)

3. The Senate's "**DREAM Act**" which was reintroduced March 6, 2007 by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL), Chuck Hagel (R-NE), and Richard Lugar (R-IN) is joined by the House companion bill, the "American Dream Act," introduced last week by Representatives Howard Berman (D-CA), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), and Lincoln Diaz-Balart (D-FL). This bipartisan legislation will allow immigrant students who were raised in the U.S. and graduate from U.S. high schools to go to college and start a path to citizenship. Both bills are seeking co-sponsors.

4. The "**Citizenship Promotion Act of 2007**" (CPA) was introduced in March by Senators Barack Obama (D-IL), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Ken Salazar (D-CO), and Representatives Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), Hilda Solis (D-CA), Ed Pastor (D-AZ), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and others. They are seeking additional sponsors!

This bill allows more possibility that all eligible legal immigrants have fair and equal access to the citizenship process. A couple of months before the introduction of CPA, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recently announced that it would be raising the application fees for naturalization applications and other immigration benefits by a significant amount, with some fees more than doubling.

The "Citizenship Promotion Act of 2007" would encourage naturalization, maintain naturalization fees at their current level, allow Congress to appropriate funds for USCIS to improve its infrastructure, create a National Citizenship Promotion Program, reduce the amount of time applicants must wait for background checks to be completed, and ensure that naturalization applicants will not be forced to use expensive electronic filing systems.¹⁰ For more information on the increase in USCIS fees or the CPA, see NALEO's website at <http://www.naleo.org/actioncenter2.html>.

5. A very interesting, national study on the **positive economic impact of immigrant entrepreneurs on US economy**. One-quarter of the publicly traded, venture capital-backed companies started in the past 15 years in the United States were founded by immigrant entrepreneurs, according to "[American Made: The Impact of Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Professionals on U.S. Competitiveness](#)," a 2006 national survey commissioned by the National Venture Capital Assn. These businesses employ more than 220,000 people in the U.S. and 400,000 internationally.

6. **The immigration trial for Hazelton, PA** came to a close March 22nd and a verdict is expected in May. This is the first such trial for local anti-immigrant legislation in the country and as such as been closely monitored by other cities with similar, pending trial dates.

The ACLU has sued to overturn the "Illegal Immigrants Relief Act of 2007", arguing that it is the duty of federal government, not local government, to enforce immigration laws. Remember that this bill was brought to bear in response to a murder in the sleepy town of Hazelton and from it stems proposals to fine landlords who rent to the undocumented, and fine employers who hire them and merchants who sell to them, while making English the official language of the town. Even though it is not law yet, companies have essentially discouraged from doing business with people who look or sound different, and there has been an onslaught of discrimination against many Latinos.

The bill implicates undocumented residents and states that they put a strain on public services, so it is interesting that in the last six years only 20 of the 8,500 felonies in the town were committed by undocumented residents and the city has actually reduced its police force, even though the city has a budget surplus.¹³

7. Equally troublesome in Pennsylvania is **the new package of anti-immigrant legislation introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives** last week. Rep. Metcalfe, who was a strong advocate against undocumented workers in last summer's Republican House Policy Committee hearings, has introduced many of the bills.

Representative Angel Cruz is planning a press event in the Capitol Building in Harrisburg on April 17 to show opposition to these bills. We will pass along more information as it becomes available.

See below for a brief description of each bill, including the number of sponsors and what Committee is has been sent to (given by ACLU of PA):

House Bill 750 – This bill would prohibit employment of illegal aliens and require participation in the Basic Pilot Program. It has 39 sponsors (34 Republicans and 5 Democrats). It has been sent to the State Government Committee. The Chair of that Committee is Representative Babette Josephs from Philadelphia.

¹³ Immigration law born of frustration, Steve Chapman, Philadelphia Inquirer, March 22, 2007

¹⁴ "Street rips commission on school budget", Philadelphia Daily News, March 21, 2007

¹⁵ Impacto, E3 Vol. 95, March 22-30, 2007

¹⁶ "Jennifer Mann: Mann and colleagues introduce gang violence prevention bill", Press Release, March 1, 2007

Immigration (continued)

House Bill 751 - This bill would provide for a memorandum of understanding between the Commonwealth and the United States Department of Justice of Department of Homeland Security. It has 46 sponsors (33 Republicans and 13 Democrats). It has been sent to the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee. The Chair of that Committee is Representative Curtis Thomas (D-Phila) who is a co-sponsor of the bill.

House Bill 752 – This bill amends the Crimes Code and would include citizenship or immigration status in criminal history records and add a section mandating arresting authorities to inquire into citizenship or immigration status. It has 44 sponsors (34 Republicans and 10 Democrats). It has been sent to the Judiciary Committee. The chair of that Committee is Representative Tom Caltagirone from Berks County.

House Bill 753 – This bill would prohibit certain licensees from knowingly employing illegal aliens. It has 46 cosponsors (41 Republicans and 5 Democrats). It has been sent to the Professional Licensure Committee which is chaired by Representative Mike Sturla from Lancaster.

House Bill 754 – This bill would require verification of lawful presence in US for anyone over 18 who have applied for public benefits. The bill has 38 sponsors (34 Republican and 4 Democrats). It has been sent to the Health and Human Services Committee which is chaired by Representative Frank Oliver (D-Phila).

In many cases advocates may be able to keep these bills from coming up in committee, but it is important to pay attention in case they are filed as amendments to other bills that are moving through the legislative process.

Links to the five bills:

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btC heck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2007&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=0750&pn=1013>

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btC heck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2007&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=0751&pn=1014>

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btC heck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2007&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=0752&pn=1015>

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btC heck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2007&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=0753&pn=1016>

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btC heck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2007&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=B&billNbr=0754&pn=1017>

Education

1. Budget season is all around! **The School District of Philadelphia recently shared a proposed budget** for the next fiscal year. The School Reform Commission has signed off on the \$2.1 billion budget that was proposed, but at the same time, they are seeking to close an estimated \$186 million budget shortfall. The budget includes \$27.6 million in new city money. Not enough to fill the gap, given that the city is projecting a surplus in the coming year of \$82 million.

If the city made up for the shortfall, though, over a five-year timeframe the proposed budget would potentially cost the city \$147 million and put the city into a \$100 million deficit by 2012. As such, both state and local officials will need to look at a longer-term plan.

CEO Paul Vallas is interested in one proposed fix that Councilman Goode has proposed that would shift property-tax savings from the city to the schools and cost the city treasury \$97 million over five years. The district has suffered from a decade of lost revenue due to various tax abatements and economic-incentive programs.

Mayor Street will not support the bill without more funds coming from the Commonwealth.¹⁴

2. **Project U-Turn, a Philadelphia city-wide campaign to focus public attention on Philadelphia's dropout crisis** and to design strategies and leverage investments to resolve it. Project U-Turn is hoping to attract more Latino youth into pathways for educational success.

<http://www.projectuturn.net/>

Safety & Violence

1. Congreso and partner organizations are looking to expand the **Latino Juvenile Justice Network** in Philadelphia. We have outlined our 2007 plan, which focuses on bringing the issues of Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration and Disproportionate Minority Contact to the police department, legislative officials and government entities, and the community. The LJJN seeks to identify issues and approaches for juvenile justice reform specific to Latinos. If you are interested in joining either the Phila. or the Reading partnerships, contact Kristin Shipler at shiplerk@congreso.net.
2. Very much in line with the priorities of the LJJN, **Philadelphia Safe and Sound has initiated a voter poll-led campaign** to:
 - a. Increase the number of high quality afterschool and youth development opportunities to ensure all children are safe and supervised during high-risk, non-school hours.
 - b. Sustain and expand prevention programs proven to reduce youth violence and homicides.
 - c. Continue to improve systems that serve children and make government accountable for measurable outcomes for kids and families.

See <http://www.afterschoolworks.org/> for details and to become involved.

3. **School violence in Philadelphia's schools** has received great attention recently in the media. In response to the various incidents against teachers, by students, the School District of Philadelphia has enacted strict measures:
 - For youth 10 and over, there is the potential of a 10-day suspension, recommendation for expulsion and even arrest.¹¹
 - There will be a teacher safety hotline for staff members and teachers to report incidents against them.

The measures are strongly criticized as band-aids that do not address the root causes of the violence taking place. Advocates instead urge improved instruction, more counselors and social workers in the schools (currently there is one counselor per 500 students and one psychologist per 1,666), and conflict resolution training.

4. Another anti-violence measure introduced by Philadelphia's Mayor Street is the **expansion of the curfew centers around the city. The Lighthouse** is now home to a curfew center in the Latino-dominant

4. Fairhill/Kensington neighborhoods which include the 24th and 25th police districts. Youth will be brought to the center for violating curfew, which is 9pm for those under 10 years old and 10:30pm for those between the ages of 13 and 17. Since implementing the first Curfew Center in Southwest Philadelphia, violence crime decreased significantly.¹⁵ The centers attempt to link youth into existing community programs and hold parents and family members accountable for having their children at home in the evenings.
5. New Resource! The Institute for the Study of Civic Values has developed a website for the **Safe Schools Campaign**, <http://safeschoolsphilly.org/>, which links civic duties to safe schools and communities and offers a resource bank of publications and organizations working to keep Philadelphia's children safe.
6. On a state level, Reps. Mike Sturla, D-Lancaster; Thomas R. Caltagirone, D-Berks; Dante Santoni, D-Berks; Robert L. Freeman, D-Northampton; and Richard T. Grucela, D-Northampton, and Jennifer Mann, D-Lehigh, (all from the "Hispanic Fertile Crescent") co-introduced **a bill aimed at giving police and district attorneys more power in combating the growing problems of gang violence**. The bill (H.B. 326) would define criminal gang activity and establish strict penalties for such activities. It also would authorize the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to establish a Criminal Gang Deterrence Fund to provide grants for community efforts to deter gang violence. This bill was first introduced August 2006, but was not approved by the time the 2005-06 legislative session ended. The legislation aims to give law enforcement the leverage it needs to successfully prosecute and get violent gang members off the streets.

Pennsylvania is one of only 11 states without specific laws to address gang violence. In 2006, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales established a \$2.5 million federal grant to fund local anti-gang efforts in six sites across the country, including the Route 222 corridor in Pennsylvania, which encompasses the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, Reading and Lancaster.

The bill came about due to increased gang-associated shootings and murders along the Route 222 corridor. House Bill 326 has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee. The committee plans to hold a series of hearings across the Commonwealth to get citizen input on issues and proposed legislation related to crime, violence and gun policies.¹⁶

Electoral Participation & Políticos

1. The race for Mayor in Philadelphia is gaining heat, as there are still multiple Democratic contenders.

Philadelphia Mayoral hopefuls for the 2007 election include declared candidates Rep. Dwight Evans, Michael Nutter, US Rep. Chaka Fattah, Rep. Brady and Tom Knox. The lone **Republican candidate is Al Taubenberg**, the President of the Greater Northeast Phila. Chamber of Commerce. Like all municipal elections around Pennsylvania, the Mayoral candidates will compete in the May 15, 2007 primary election. Learn more about the candidates at *Congreso's Mayoral Candidates' Forum at Temple University, 1114 W Berks Street, Anderson Hall on April 5th at 5:30pm.*

2. The City Council races in Philadelphia are equally competitive. In the **Latino dominant 7th Councilmatic District**, there are three Democratic contenders for the primary: Maria Quinones-Sanchez, Marnie Aument-Loughrey and incumbent Councilman Savage and Republican candidate Gary Grisalfi. *Congreso is co-hosting a forum, with Henry Veguilla as moderator, on April 10th at the Al-Aqsa Islamic Society at 1502 Germantown Avenue at 6pm.* The event is open to the public and press.

Expected to be even more contested is the **City Council at-large race**, which needs to fill 5 Democratic and 2 Republican seats. There were 20 Democrats who filed petitions (which includes Latinos Councilman Ramos and Ben Ramos) and 5 Republicans.

3. The United States' highest ranking Hispanic, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, is under considerable scrutiny for the firing of eight federal prosecutors. Although he claims to not have been involved directly in the firings, there are testimonies to the contrary. Senator Specter has asked the Senate to give him a fair chance, while President Bush maintains his support for Gonzales.

4. Senators Menendez, Salazar and Martinez chaired a hearing recently for Congress to consider a commissioned study for the **creation of a National Museum of the American Latino Community.** Having been introduced for several years, it is gaining traction with the 110th Congress, as it has already passed unanimously as HR 512 in the House of Representatives.

Important Dates

- **April 2007: Mayoral Forums**
 - **April 5, 5:30pm: Congreso and Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for the Latino community, focusing on community issues:** All major Mayoral candidates, both Democratic and Republican, have confirmed their attendance. At Temple University, Anderson Hall, 1114 W. Berks Street.
 - **April 3, 5-7pm APM and Impacto** are also hosting an open air forum for the Latino Community, at 8th and Berks Streets.
 - **April 4, 6:30pm:** Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth: Mayorla Candidates **Forum on Children's Issues** at the Free Library of Philadelphia at 1901 Vine Street. Reserve your seat at www.pccy.org
 - **April 13, 1pm: 2007 Mayoral Youth Forum**, with The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC) and The Philadelphia Youth Network, Inc. (PYN) at the National Constitution Center.
 - **April 26, 6:30-8:30pm, Vote for Homes! Mayoral candidates forum on housing, jobs, and services** at Arch Street United Methodist Church, 55 North Broad Street (Broad and Arch Streets)
- **April 10, 2007 6pm**

A **7th District City Council forum** (the Latino majority district) is being held at the Al-Aqsa Mosque at 1502 Germantown Avenue (4th and Germantown), addressing the issues of affordable housing, youth and community services, economic development and public land. Congreso is co-hosting alongside the Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition and the Kensington South Neighborhood Advisory Council. All are welcome!
- **April 10, 2007 2-5pm**

The Urban Studies Program at Penn, in partnership with The Philadelphia Daily News, WHYY-FM and others, is hosting ***an in-depth forum called "Urban Poverty and Prosperity: Building an Agenda for Philadelphia's Next Mayor."*** Sponsors have invited someone from the administration of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to present that city's poverty alleviation/wealth creation plan and its implementation. A panel and audience discussion will follow. For more information and directions call 215-898-7799.
- **April 12, 2007 12noon**

The Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (GACLA) is holding its ***Monthly State Latino Gathering*** at 321 Forum Building in Harrisburg, PA. it's an opportunity to network, learn, share information, listen to special guests, engage in an inclusive-progressive Latino agenda, and connect with Pennsylvania's educational, community, business and political leaders. RSVP at 717-783-3877 or via e-mail at www.gacla.state.pa.us.
- **April 16, 2007**

Your last day for two important civic duties: ***deadline to register to vote*** in time for the May 16, 2007 primary and the ***last day to file taxes***.
- **May 15, 2007**

Municipal government primary elections. Make sure to take a friend to the polls and vote!

If you have any other information that would be important for Congreso to include, please email the Director of Civic Engagement, Kristin Shipler, at shiplerk@congreso.net. We want to represent and advocate for all issues affecting Latinos in the SE Pennsylvania area.

Important Links

GOVERNMENT

- **US Senator Specter** <http://specter.senate.gov/>
- **US Senator Casey** <http://casey.senate.gov/>
- **US House of Representatives** <http://www.house.gov/>
- **PA General Assembly** <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>
- **Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (GACLA)**
<http://www.gacla.state.pa.us/gacla/site/default.asp>
- **Philadelphia City Council** <http://www.phila.gov/citycouncil/index.html>
- **US Citizenship and Immigration Services** <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm>
- **Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate** (resources statewide for programs that serve victims of domestic, child, elderly abuse and others) <http://www.pbpp.state.pa.us/ova/site/default.asp>

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- **Congreso de Latinos Unidos** (Multi-service, social service and civic engagement organization for Latino communities in Philadelphia) www.congreso.net
- **ENPYS – Eastern North Philadelphia Youth Services Coalition** (a group of community-based organizations located in Eastern North Philadelphia to coordinate services and ensure that children and families have access to resources, information and support services) www.northphillysos.net/
- **National Council of La Raza** (Latino advocacy) www.nclr.org
- **National Immigration Forum** (national immigration issues) <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- **National Immigration Law Center** (immigrant civil rights) www.nilc.org/
- **Pew Hispanic Center** (Latino research & statistics) <http://pewhispanic.org/>
- **We Are America Alliance** (Federal immigration reform) www.weareamericaalliance.org
- **Committee of Seventy** (Philadelphia-based electoral information) www.seventy.org
- **The Next Mayor's Project** (informative to learn about the Philadelphia Mayoral candidates and how the public wants them to prioritize the issues!) www.nextmayorproject.org
- **The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** (fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals) www.cbpp.org
- **Pennsylvania Budget & Policy Center** (a project focused on state tax, budget, and related policy matters, and effects on working families) <http://www.pennbpc.org/>
- **The Children's Advocacy Project of Philadelphia** (over 200 resources to help families in need) www.cap4kids.org/philadelphia
- **Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicator's Project** (social, environmental and economic indicators that portray the quality of life in the region's communities) www.temple.edu/mpip
- **The Next Great City** (dedicated to creating a positive future for Philadelphia by advocating for policies that enhance environmental quality, strengthen neighborhoods and increase our economic competitiveness. *Congreso has endorsed this effort.*) www.nextgreatcity.org

