

Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community
(*Bolded areas require IMMEDIATE ACTION*)

NEW

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IMPORTANT DATES

- **May 16, 2006 7am-8pm**
Primary Elections – Make sure to VOTE!! Follow this link to find your polling place. Only enter your street address: <http://www.seventy.org/map/>
- **May 16, 2006 7am-8pm**
Congreso's Election Monitoring Team will be working in Ward 19, Congreso's local ward, to ensure informed, safe and comfortable polling places for the primary elections. COME OUT AND VOTE!!
- **May 17, 2006**
National Lobbying Day for Immigration Reform: See page to call our Senators once again!
- **May 17, 2006 3-5pm**
PICC is hosting a meeting on "*Working with Immigrant Elders*" at the Nationalities Service Center, 1300 Spruce Street. Learn about the special issues facing immigrant elders, available resources, unmet needs and how advocates can work together to inform and serve this population.
- **May 17, 2006 7:00-8:30pm**
Blueprint for a Safe Philadelphia City Council Forum, Olney High School 100E. Duncannon Ave., integration of efforts to unify the city's approach to combating youth violence. Congreso will testify on this date! Other hearings are being held *May 25* at Simon Gratz High and *June 15* at South Philadelphia High School.
- **May 18, 2006 5-7:30pm**
Filling the Gap: *How the immigrant labor force supports health industries* throughout the Delaware Valley sponsored by The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians in partnership with the Life Sciences Career Alliance (LSCA) at Room 228 at the Community College of Philadelphia's Business and Industry Building, 18th and Callowhill Streets. RSVP at Phone, 215-557-2856; E-mail, janice@welcomingcenter.org.
- **May 25, 2006 6-8:30pm**
Latino Juvenile Justice Network Community Forum, Julia de Burgos School. Come to see, hear and participate in how the juvenile justice system is affecting the Latino community.
- **June 3, 2006 9am-1pm**

Creating Community through Collaboration: *A Town Hall Meeting about Integrating Immigrants into Philadelphia's Neighborhoods:* Julia de Burgos School. Come to see, hear and participate in how the juvenile justice system is affecting the Latino community. Link to: <http://www.welcomingcenter.org/calendar/index.php?date=2006-06-03> to register.

- **June 5, 2006 at 1:30pm**

NEW date: The “*Raise the Minimum Wage Rally & Lobby Day*” in Harrisburg. Contact Kristin to participate! See <http://www.philaup.org/> for more information.

- **July 1, 2006**

Begins *Democracy Summer*, a nationwide effort led by the We Are America Alliance, to help eligible immigrants become naturalized citizens and register new voters - 1 million goal for the nation. Congreso's goal is 1,000 new voters by October 2006.

- **September 2-3, 2006**

Labor Day weekend - *Large mobilization* for immigration reform, either regionally or in Washington DC (TBD)

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 Greater Philadelphia area.

▶ LOCAL LEVEL

Adult Education

Summary

The Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) is decreasing the availability and increasing the costs of Adult Literacy classes (Adult Basic Education - ABE, GED, and ESL) offered to Latinos in Philadelphia. With a \$57million budget from public monies, less than 1% of that is dedicated to these courses. There is about a 60% reduction in the courses offered.

Congreso's Position

We would like to challenge CCP to increase the contribution to ABE, GED and ESL classes to at least 5% of the citywide budget. Less than 50% of Latinos in Philadelphia have a high school diploma or its equivalent and 50% are unemployed. Without this educational opportunity, Latinos are even more limited in advancing in their education; hence, limiting their employment opportunities.

Congreso's Action

- Congreso is stating its case directly to the Board of CCP, as we attempt to meet with leadership on this issue.
- Congreso's President, Nick Torres, testified to City Council on March 29, 2006, imploring for an increase in citywide funding and an increase in the allocation designated for adult literacy classes.
- Congreso is working with the larger Latino and other immigration population to encourage demand for increasing funding and availability of courses through CCP.
- As CCP may receive another increase in local funding, Congreso will be working with the City Council to advocate that this new funding stream reach the adult literacy classes.

▶ STATE LEVEL

Minimum Wage Increase – HB 257

Summary

Increasing Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$7.15 per hour. The House of Representatives approved the bill on April 5, which would increase the state's minimum wage to \$6.25 by July 1, 2006 and to \$7.15 by July 1, 2007. Governor Rendell and our State Senator Christine Tartaglione (who introduced minimum wage reform under SB 926) are in strong support of this measure. With House approval, increasing the minimum wage is now in the hands of the Senate. NY, NJ, DE, and MD and 15 other states have already passed minimum wage increases. Two-thirds of workers earning the minimum wage are women. 7% of working Pennsylvanians earn this wage.

Congreso's Position

We support the measure as it will assist many families (Latinos) and adults to spiral out of poverty and reach a more livable wage. The current minimum wage falls below the federal poverty level, and as such puts a strain on taxpayers through the social welfare system. Without an increase low wage earners cannot invest in education, healthcare, homeownership, or retirement.

Congreso's Action

- **Attend the "Raise the Minimum Wage Rally & Lobby Day" in Harrisburg on June 5th at 1:30pm.** Contact Kristin if you would like to attend! See information at <http://www.philaup.org/>

- The most influential Senators at this point are: Majority Leader David Brightbill (represents Lebanon, PA), President Pro Tem Robert Jubilier (represents Altoona, PA), and Labor and Industry Committee Chair Joe Scarnati (HB 257 is in his committee, and he represents Warren, PA). If you know people living in these areas, encourage them to call these Senators to have them get this legislation passed now! The vote in the Senate has stalled for too long (and there seem to be enough Senators who support the bill, that if brought to a vote, it will pass.)
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State Budget

Summary

Governor Rendell is proposing support for child care, education, child welfare and health care for children in the budget for 2006-07. This budget includes 1) increased support for nurse family partnerships, 2) provisions to become a state where all children are covered with health insurance, and 3) an education budget that strengthens school districts' ability to provide small class size, full day kindergarten, and extra support when students begin having trouble in school.

Congreso's Position

Congreso supports all programs that strengthen children and families, improve quality and access in child care, support school readiness and effective public education.

Congreso's Action

- The Governor's budget has not passed and is not uniformly supported. Let your State Representatives http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/representatives_alpha.cfm and Senators http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/senemail.cfm know that children and families need more, not less support. With threatened, massive cuts in the federal budget, we need as much state support for social programs as possible!
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Primary Election Monitoring & Voter Registration

Summary

We have a big election year in Pennsylvania. We have one senator seat and our Governor seat up for election. Senator Santorum (R) will run against the Democratic candidate who will be determined in the primary on May 16, 2006. The leading Democratic candidates are Bob Casey, Alan Sanders and Chuck Pennacchio. The Governor's election is another big election this year, among incumbent Governor Rendell (D) and candidates who will be determined at the May 16 primary. The Committee of 70 has put together an excellent citizen's guide to elections available at: <http://www.seventy.org/electioninfo/06elections/Citizensguide2006.pdf>.

Congreso's Position

Congreso encourages all citizens who are over 18 years of age to register to vote. Haga oír la voz – it's your right! If you didn't register in time to vote for the primary elections on May 16, 2006, you still have time to register for the November elections.

Congreso's Actions

- Congreso has 14 Election Monitors ready to go for the Primary on May 16. We are monitoring Ward 19 polls, as we support hassle-free, voter confident elections.
 - Congreso is participating in the National Council of La Raza's "LEAP to Action!" voter mobilization project. <http://www.nclr.org/content/programs/detail/1198/> Congreso has set a goal of surpassing its 2004 goal of registering 500 majority-Latino voters in Philadelphia and surrounding counties. You will be hearing soon how you can become involved in this important effort, as we develop
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outreach and registration efforts internally and throughout our communities.

Mercury Regulation

Summary

Pennsylvania power plants rank number two in the nation for mercury pollution, behind only Texas. Pennsylvania has the third highest concentration of mercury nationally (behind Texas and Ohio). The Governor's Pennsylvania Mercury Rule seeks to lessen mercury emissions for all power plants. This rule would force power plants to cut their deadly mercury pollution by 90 percent by 2015 (which is a higher standard than the EPA's goal of 70%).

Companion bills in Pennsylvania have been introduced in both houses to stop the mercury rule; both go by the misleading name of the "Clean Air Mercury Compliance Act." The bills are numbered HB 2610 in the House, and SB 1201 in the Senate. In them, it is proposed that mercury emissions be controlled by allowing "cleaner" plants to sell pollution credits to "dirtier" ones and that rule-making authority of the independent Environmental Quality Board be taken away. This is the body that is now able to guard children and pregnant women against mercury emitted from coal-fired power plants. Both bills have been introduced to Environmental Resources and Energy in the last two weeks.

Congreso's Position

Congreso strongly objects any legislation that puts industry profit over children's and pregnant women's health. Trading credits does not lessen emissions. Placing regulations on all power plants does control mercury emissions. Philadelphia is especially susceptible because of its proximity to rivers. Congreso opposes HB 2610 and SB 1201.

Congreso's Action

- Congreso has sent a letter to Representative Cruz, ensuring that he does not sign onto the bill.
 - Call your State Representatives and Senators to ensure that they do not support this legislation.
<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>
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Marriage Amendment & Domestic Violence

Summary

The "Marriage Protection Amendment (HB 2381)" is gaining considerable momentum in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. This amendment would constitutionally limit marriage to one woman and one man and would prohibit the Commonwealth and its subdivisions from recognizing a legal status "substantially equivalent" to marriage. In its discriminatory efforts to prohibit same sex marriages and legal unions comparable to marriage, HB 2381 also places Pennsylvania's Protection from Abuse (PFA) Act in jeopardy.

Congreso's Position

Congreso supports the Pennsylvania Coalition of Against Domestic Violence in its efforts to protect victims of domestic abuse. Supporters of HB 2381 have been successful in convincing many legislators that Pennsylvania's PFA Act will not be affected by the proposed amendment. House members need to realize that this legislative proposal will hurt unmarried victims of domestic violence. Some households are made up of a couple that is not legally married. If one of the partners in that couple is violated, under this act, they would not be protected under domestic violence legislation. The legislation, as written, would only protect married couples of one man and one woman.

Congreso's Action

- 1) Call your state representative and urge her/him to oppose HB 2381.
 - 2) Ask that your representative speak out against HB 2381 in caucus, where members of both parties meet to decide how they will vote before the issue goes to the House floor.
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► FEDERAL LEVEL

Immigration Reform – S. 2611/2612, S. 2454 & H. 4437

Summary

Action this week on the Immigration Reform bills: The Senate is debating THIS WEEK, the week of May 15, to further negotiate terms and amendments for the proposed immigration reform legislation. Their goal is to pass legislation by Memorial Day! President Bush spoke of proposed legislation during his address the evening of May 15. The proposed bills include:

- security and enforcement provisions, including using electronic and aerial surveillance to create a virtual wall along the U.S.-Mexico border,
- requiring employers to verify the legal status of all new employees, and tougher sanctions for employers who hire illegal workers,
- establishing a temporary guest-worker plan,
- allowing most of the 12 million illegal workers said to be in the United States to remain while they seek legal status,
- allowing illegal immigrants who have been in the country for at least five years to remain in-country while obtaining green cards (this is under the plan negotiated by Sen. Martinez, R-Fl. and Sen. **Chuck Hagel**, R-Neb.), and under the compromise,
- those in the country for three-to-five years would have to apply for permanent status at a U.S. point of entry, while those here less than three years would have to return to their home countries.

*To see President Bush's plan on immigration: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/immigration/>

**On the Pennsylvania State level, last week the legislature unanimously approved legislation that would make local governments, nonprofit groups and businesses to repay state grants if any of the money is used to employ undocumented immigrants. The penalties depend upon whether employers knew, or should have known, that they or their contractors were employing an undocumented immigrant as part of a project that received state money. The bill has come at the same time that federal lawmakers are considering major changes to the nation's immigration laws. Gov. Rendell is still reviewing the legislation and it is not known whether he plans to sign it.

Congreso's Position

Congreso opposes Anti-immigrant enforcement-only proposals like Sensenbrenner-King (HR 4437) and seeks more comprehensive reform. We support the Senate Judiciary Committee's work in creating a more reasonable, less enforcement-only bill as it addresses Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Comprehensive Immigration reform must to include:

- A means for the 12 million undocumented to earn legal status and citizenship
- A legal way for new workers to work in the United States
- A removal of delays that keep family members apart for years
- Targeted and effective enforcement that respects humanness and liberty of expression
- Discouragement of local police enforcement of federal immigration laws
- Inclusion of due process, and
- Exclusion of indefinite detention.

Congreso's Action

- **National Lobbying Day for Immigration Reform is Wednesday, May 17. Call, write, or visit your local offices for our US Senators and US Representatives.** Use the points above to create your message! (Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900)

- We gathered approximately 100 staff and clients on May 1's "A Day Without an Immigrant", calling everyone to action by dedicating their time to doing at least one thing to help an immigrant.
 - We also participated in the National Day of Action on Immigrants Rights on April 10, with approximately 25 staff and clients.
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Immigration Reform - American Dream Act

Summary

House Introduces the "American Dream Act" (H.R. 5131) - On Thursday, April 6 Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Howard Berman (D-CA), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) introduced the "American Dream Act," H.R. 5131. One of the original cosponsors is Melissa Hart (R-PA), who represented Western PA. This bill takes the place of the "Student Adjustment Act." This bill will affect immigrant youth in our community.

The bill was created to mirror the Senate "DREAM Act," S. 2075. As in the "DREAM Act," the "American Dream Act" would: encourage states to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students, create a path to citizenship, protect from deportation, and grant work authorization for students. Youth would be able to apply for up to six years of legal-resident status upon graduating from high school, obtaining a GED or being admitted to college. If, during that six-year period, they complete a two-year college program, finish at least two years toward a four-year degree or serve at least two years in the U.S. military, they would qualify for permanent residence.

Eight states, including New York, California, Texas and Illinois, already allow undocumented youth to pay in-state tuitions rates at colleges and universities in their states. The federal bills would secure this around the country, while also allowing these same youth to graduate. Even if sweeping immigration reform does not pass in Congress, the DREAM Act may still be passed on its own.

Congreso's Position

Congreso, along with NCLR, support the "DREAM Act", S1545 and did support the "Student Adjustment Act", HR 1684. The "American DREAM Act" has restrictions in it that were not included in the "Student Adjustment Act", like requiring high school graduation or a GED for immigration relief. The benefit of the "American DREAM Act" is that it so closely reflects the language of the DREAM Act. As such, the legislation is more likely to be passed.

Congreso's Action

To demonstrate support for the "American Dream Act":

- May 10 was the "National Call-in Day for the American Dream Act". We called our House Representatives to encourage them to cosponsor the "American Dream Act."
- (Rep. Hart is the only Representative from PA who is a sponsor at this point). Find out who your representative is at <http://www.house.gov/>. Get the phone number for him/her and call on the 10th! The representative in our district (where the Congreso office is) is Robert Brady (D), and his number is (202) 225-4731. Possible message:

"I'm calling to urge Representative (*name*) to support of the American DREAM Act, HR 5131. As a constituent and a person who cares about the future of our country, I want Representative (*name*) to co-sponsor HR 5131. The American DREAM Act will allow bright, dedicated young people the chance to give something in return to the U.S. Please tell Representative (*name*) to sign on to the American DREAM Act".

Federal Budget in the House

Summary

The House of Representatives still has yet to reach an agreement on a Budget Resolution. They're attempting to adopt a budget resolution by this week, before the House began floor consideration of the fiscal 2007 appropriations bills. A new deal to move more than \$6 billion away from defense and international funding to a number of domestic programs may enable House leaders to put together a majority this week. The biggest concern is lack of funding for the the fiscal 2007 Labor-HHS-Education spending bill; at least \$7.2 billion needs to be added to Labor-Health & Human Services-Education programs just to prevent cuts and keep up with inflation. The House budget leaves out funds needed next year for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and for Medicaid for low-income families who've left welfare for work. These programs remained in the President and the Senate's versions of the budget.

- The plan would cut 2007 funding for domestic discretionary programs \$12 billion below the Senate-passed level.
- The plan would allow much larger tax cuts in 2007 through 2010 than are currently allowed.
- Despite its proposals to reduce domestic programs, the plan would increase the deficit by \$254 billion over five years, because of the effect of its tax cuts and defense spending increases.
- The budget includes a provision outlining an increase in the statutory debt limit by \$653 billion to \$9.6 trillion.

Congreso's Position

Congreso opposes domestic social service reductions to the budget.

Congreso's Action

- Congreso is named on a federal listing of organizations opposed to the current Budget Resolution in the House of Representatives.
- Continue to call your House Representative at 1-800-459-1887 today and demand that more domestic funding be added to the 2007 budget. Any cuts will severely damage social service programs, and hence, the well-being of many whom we serve.

Voting Rights Act – HR 9

Summary

The Voting Right Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 ("VRARA") ensures full and fair access to the voting process for all citizens. The VRARA would renew and restore key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This piece of legislation has served as a tool to greatly diminish electoral discrimination against Latinos and other ethnic and racial minorities. Section 5 of the VRARA prohibits intentionally discriminatory voting practices and voting changes preventing minority voters from electing their chosen candidates. Renewal of Sections 4(f)4 and 203 of the Voting Rights Act will make certain that jurisdictions with large limited English proficient communities provide language assistance to Latino, Asian American, American Indian or Alaska Native citizens throughout the voting and registration process.

Congreso's Position

Congreso supports legislation that protects Latino voters and gives our voters a voice in the democratic system of government that we have.

Congreso's Action

The House of Representatives will be voting on this measure soon, and then it will also be voted on in the Senate within the next few months. So call your Representative or Senators, to make sure s/he supports passing HR9, retaining provisions for language assistance and protections against barriers to voting. You can find out who your representative is and how to reach him/her by linking to <http://www.house.gov/>. The representative in our district (where the Congreso office is) is Robert Brady (D), and his number is (202) 225-4731. To call our Senators, dial: Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900

Federal Healthcare

Summary

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is working to assist Philadelphians to be part of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group's efforts to poll the American people to develop recommendations for the President and Congress to provide "health care that works for all Americans."

On April 10 Congreso participated in a meeting where approx. 250 Philadelphians took part in a community roundtable, run by the Citizens Health Care Working Group. Now more of us can make our voices heard on-line. See below for instructions on how to give your opinions about healthcare in our country.

Congreso's Position

Congreso supports efforts for encouraging universal healthcare and encourages staff and community members to participate in this forum.

Congreso's Action

Log onto: http://www.citizenshealthcare.gov/speak_out/comment.php Click on "Tell Us What You Think" and complete the sections "What's Important to You," "Share Your Experience" and "Health Care Poll" to voice your opinions.

Important Links

GOVERNMENT

- US Senator Specter <http://specter.senate.gov/>
- US Senator Santorum <http://santorum.senate.gov/public/>
- US House of Representatives <http://www.house.gov/>
- PA General Assembly <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>
- Philadelphia City Council <http://www.phila.gov/citycouncil/index.html>

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- National Council of La Raza (Latino advocacy) www.nclr.org
- National Immigration Forum (national immigration issues) <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- Committee of Seventy (electoral information) www.seventy.org
- Nationalities Service Center (immigration services) <http://www.nationalitiesservice.org/>
- We Are America Alliance (immigration reform) www.weareamericaalliance.org