

Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community

Bolded areas require IMMEDIATE ACTION, and more detail is given on the pages cited.

NEW

Summer School Site Availability.....Pg.3

The School District made the decision to close schools on July 28 instead of August 18th, and some have no place to go! Send the attached letters to both Philadelphia City Council members and members of the General Assembly. The decision to close is close to being overturned!!

Ryan White Reauthorization – S2823.....Pg. 11

Funding has been reauthorized for services to AIDS patients, with a 5 percent, increase recommended. Now the question is how are the monies going to be spent? Call our Senators and give them your thoughts.

UPDATES

State Budget.....Pg. 4

Gov. Rendell has proposed a very modest increase in the “Cover All Kids initiative”, which seeks to cover all children in PA with healthcare. Encourage State Senators and Representatives to support this.

Mercury Regulation & Other Environmental Concerns.....Pg. 5

The New Penn Future Resident Survey highlights Philadelphians priorities to City officials; the top five issues of concern are crime, education and the environment. Support these concerns, especially if you identify with them.

Immigration Reform.....Pg. 7

English as the National Language, the “Orange Card” program, a 370 feet fence along the border, paths to legalization; important decision are being made. Call your Senator to let him know how you feel! Do it TODAY, as **the final vote on the immigration reform bill is anticipated tomorrow!**

American DREAM ActPg. 10

On Wednesday, May 24, 2006, thousands of **youth** from across the United States will participate in a national call-in day for immigrant rights. Call our Senators to ask them to “Keep our Families Together”.

Federal Budget in the House.....Pg. 11

The House passed the Budget Resolution. Major cuts from the Senate and Presidential versions were passed. Continue to call our US Representatives and Senators to ensure more funding for domestic programs.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **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.

- **June 15, 2006 7:00-8:30pm**

Blueprint for a Safe Philadelphia City Council Forum, South Philadelphia High School, integration of efforts to unify the city's approach to combating youth violence. Congreso will testify on this date!

- **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)

- **November 4, 2006**

Dash for Democracy 5k Run by Committee of 70: an event to celebrate what democracy means to you. <http://www.dashfordemocracy.org/>

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.

Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community *In Detail* - **NOTE: NEW UPDATES FOR THE WEEK ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN GREEN.**

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

Summer School Site Availability

Summary

The School District made the decision to close schools on July 28 instead of August 18th, thereby necessitating that many Beacon Summer Camp Programs find alternate sites for the last 3 weeks of the Summer Camp Program. Many Beacon providers are encountering significant problems in identifying alternate sites to hold the Summer Camp Programs. There are potentially substantial relocation costs and parents may be reluctant to send their children to a new site, particularly ones that are in different neighborhoods. Children and families are better served by the Program staying in the same site for the entire summer. This will affect our summer programs that are offered by the Children & Youth Services Division.

Congreso's Position

We agree that maintaining the current school sites is preferential to finding new ones. Children and their families will feel safer, and the costs will be kept to a more reasonable level.

Congreso's Action

- Send letters to both Philadelphia City Council members and members of the General Assembly asking them to urge the School District to reconsider its decision and permit the Summer Camp Programs to remain in the schools until August 18th. Attached is a draft letter to send to your representatives. Contact information for City Council members is available at www.phila.gov./citycouncil and contact information for state representatives and senators is available at www.legis.state.pa.us. Encourage the parents of our children to do the same!!

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.)

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. In terms of the CHIP program, Gov. Rendell has proposed a very modest increase in the "Cover All Kids initiative", which seeks to cover all children in PA with healthcare.

While 79 percent of the children eligible for free CHIP are enrolled, the real challenge is getting benefits to those who qualify for subsidized CHIP. Two-thirds of these children do not have any health coverage and are not enrolled. About 29,000 children in Pennsylvania are going without health care coverage. This often results in unreimbursed care provided by hospitals, clinics and other health-care providers. Children who don't receive rudimentary preventative care often end up sicker, requiring more expensive treatment. CHIP also bears on educational goals. Healthy children attend more and do better in school than sick ones.

To extend CHIP to more of these children, Gov. Rendell is requesting \$4.4 million in his budget proposal. The cost is expected to rise to \$50 million over five years.

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!

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 Bob Casey. 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! You have until mid-October to register for the November elections.

Congreso's Actions

- Congreso sent out 14 Election Monitors for the Primary on May 16. We monitored all of the Ward 19 polls, and it was quite an experience. Please join us as we intend to volunteer for the elections again in November. **Thank you to our volunteers!!**
- 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 registering 1,000 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 outreach and registration efforts internally and throughout our communities.

Mercury Regulation (HB2610) & Other Environmental Concerns

Summary

The Penn Future Resident Survey was released at a press conference that Congreso attended May 22, 2006. This survey sampled over 600 Philadelphians in February and March 2006 to prioritize issues that affect the livability of Philadelphia and state how important it is for City officials to support improvement in these areas. Respondents placed, in rank order, the following top 5 issues that affect them:

- Crime;
- Education;
- Sewage & pollution in the rivers;
- Abandoned housing; and
- Leaks and water main breaks.

Another important result that came from the survey is that Philadelphia residents believe that improvements to the natural and physical environment of Philadelphia will result in economic benefit to the city. Using the results of this study will be important, as we educate voters on issues of importance to Philadelphians. Question is, in your experience, "Do you agree with the stated priorities?"

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. *After multiple attempts, we still have not heard from his office to see if he supports this legislation! There's been no movement on the legislation since April 24, 2006, so it's still on the table.*
- Call your State Representatives and Senators to ensure that they do not support this legislation. <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>

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. *There's been no movement on this bill since April 24, 2006. There's still time to call!*

- 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.

FEDERAL LEVEL

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

Summary

Action this week (May 22, 2006) on the Immigration Reform bills – multiple amendments!! These are the addition to the bills that are proposed, and they will either strengthen or weaken the bills. Some of the amendments considered last week (as outlined by the National Immigration Forum):

** An interesting amendment to follow is the Senator Feinstein “orange card” amendment, which would streamline and expand the legalization process (see <http://www.cirnnow.org> for more information). It’s scheduled for vote on Wednesday, May 24, 2006.

1. **Isakson Enforcement First:** Would mandate that the earned legalization program could not be implemented until the borders are secure. FAILED 55-40
2. **Salazar Side by Side:** Provides that the Secretary of Homeland Security must certify that the land borders are secure and that enforcement authorizations are met and operational before a program to legalize unauthorized aliens can come into effect. PASSED 79-16
3. **Dorgan-Stabenow Amendment:** Would eliminate the temporary worker provisions of the bill. MOTION TO TABLE PASSED 69-28 (which means that the amendment is dead)
4. **Bingaman-Feinstein Reduction of Temporary Worker Visas:** Lowers the number of temporary workers from 325,000 to 200,000 and eliminates the market-based cap adjustment in the Senate bill. MOTION TO TABLE REJECTED 18-79. AMENDMENT ADOPTED BY VOICE VOTE.
5. **Kerry Increased Border Equipment:** Would increase border security and related equipment. ADOPTED BY VOICE VOTE.
6. **Kyl-Cornyn Bars to Participation:** Would make the following categories of individuals ineligible for earned legalization: (a) subject to final orders of removal, (b) failure to depart under voluntary departure, (c) been convicted of a serious crime here or believed to have committed a serious crime abroad, danger to national security, etc., and (d) 3 misdemeanors or one felony. Includes a limited discretionary waiver. PASSED 99-0
7. **Obama-Feinstein-Bingaman Guestworker Proposal on Prevailing Wage and Protecting Unemployed Americans:** Would establish a prevailing wage for all occupations and directs the employer to use Department of Labor data for calculating a prevailing wage in cases where neither a collective bargaining agreement exists nor the Service Contract Act governs. ACCEPTED ON VOICE VOTE.
8. **Sessions Border Fence:** To construct a fence along approximately 370 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. PASSED 83-16
9. **Stevens Amendment:** Would extend the deadline given to the Secretary of Homeland Security for the implementation of a new travel document plan for border crossings to June 1, 2009. PASSED BY VOICE VOTE.
10. **Santorum:** Would allow additional countries to participate in the visa waiver program under section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act if they meet certain criteria. PASSED BY VOICE VOTE

11. **Vitter-Grassley to Strike Earned Legalization and AgJOBS:** Would strip the heart of this bill's provisions which deal with undocumented immigrants. FAILED 66-33
12. **Kyl-Cornyn: Strike Self Petition:** Would prevent temporary workers from petitioning for legal permanent residency on their own. PASSED 50-48
13. **Kennedy-McCain-Graham Side by Side to Cornyn Amendment Striking Self-Petition:** This amendment would restore most options for temporary workers to self-petition for lawful permanent resident status. PASSED 56-43
14. **Ensign Social Security:** Would prevent lawfully-present immigrant workers from claiming Social Security based on earnings credited before they were authorized to work in the United States. MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO 50-49 (the amendment is dead)
15. **Inhofe English Language Amendment:** This amendment makes English the national language of the United States and would potentially deny a wide range of information and services to millions of U.S. citizens who are not completely English proficient. PASSED 63-34
16. **Salazar English Language Amendment:** Reaffirms that English is our common and unifying language and reasserts support for language rights. PASSED 58-39
17. **Kyl-Cornyn: Strike Path to Green Card for Temporary Workers:** Would strip any opportunity for a temporary worker to adjust to a permanent residence. MOTION TO TABLE PASSED 58-35 (the amendment is dead)
18. **Clinton Amendment on State Impact Assistance:** Would establish a grant program to provide financial assistance to states and local governments for the costs of providing health care and educational services to noncitizens, and to provide additional funding for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program. FAILED 43-52
19. **Cornyn Amendment on State Impact Assistance:** Would require aliens seeking adjustment of status to pay a supplemental application fee, which shall be used to provide financial assistance to states for health and educational services for noncitizens. PASSED 64-32
20. **Vitter Amendment on Document Requirements:** Would modify the document requirements for showing employment eligibility under earned legalization; would strike the "intent of Congress" clause that takes into account the difficulty in obtaining and providing documents. PASSED ON VOICE VOTE
21. **Nelson Amendment on Detention:** Increases detention bed space by 20,000. PASSED ON VOICE VOTE
22. **Akaka Veteran-Related Amendment:** Would exempt certain children of Filipino WW II veterans from the family immigration visa cap. PASSED ON VOICE VOTE

Another important note: When the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** was passed and then recently reauthorized (with Sen. Specter as a sponsor), it included specific protections for immigrants based on studies that showed that domestic violence can be exacerbated in marriages where a non-citizen's legal status depends on an abuser. However, the proposal the Senate is currently considering, S.2611, cuts immigrant victims of domestic abuse off from immigration relief created by VAWA, endangering thousands of immigrant women and children.

Week of May 15: The Senate is debated this week 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.
- We must ensure protection for immigrant victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or trafficking. The current bill will cut these victims off from immigration relief created by the Violence Against Women Act 12 years ago.

Congreso's Action

- Call our Senators to ask them to support responsible amendments to the comprehensive immigration bill (including the possible change to VAWA)! (Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900)
- We recognized National Lobbying Day for Immigration Reform on Wednesday, May 17 by mobilizing our staff to call, write, or visit our local offices for our US Senators and US Representatives.
- 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.

Immigration Reform - American Dream Act

Summary

Week of May 22, 2006: On May 24 thousands of **youth** from across the United States will participate in a national call-in day for immigrant rights. That afternoon, a smaller group of youth from across the country will be at the Capitol in Washington, DC sharing personal testimony at a national press event. See information below about the **DREAM ACT** and making this phone call.

Week of May 15, 2006: **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":

- **On Wednesday, May 24**, between 2:30 and 5:30 PM Eastern Time, call our Senators, and tell them to "Keep Our Families Together." (Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900) What to say (and you won't be given much time on the phone:

"My name is [your name], I live in [your city] and I am [your age]. I'm calling because I am very concerned about the immigration bill that the Senate will vote on this week. The most important thing the Senator must remember is to keep our families together by voting yes for the DREAM Act, so that youth can more ably attend college."

- 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 to get more representatives to sponsor this bill. 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".

Ryan White Reauthorization – S2823

Summary

A Senate committee approved legislation Wednesday May 17, 2006 that would reauthorize funding for services to AIDS patients. In essence, this is good news, as President Bush has requested \$2.1 billion for the program in fiscal 2007, a \$95 million, or 5 percent, increase. The potential problem lies in how the monies are going to be spent, as the bill that polarizes needs in rural states against needs for urban areas. They vote reauthorized a 1990 law (PL 101-381) - named after Ryan White, the young AIDS activist who died of the disease the same year - that provides a safety net to patients with HIV and AIDS by funding medication, health care and support services. Panel Democrats Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, a bill cosponsor, and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York have argued that states with urban centers still bear the brunt of the disease and should not have funding reduced. The bill would create a tiered system of larger and smaller cities in an effort to distribute funds to more rural states. It also would weaken the provisions that kept funding stable to cities that first experienced the epidemic. It also creates national standards of care by mandating that 75 percent of the funds go to "core medical services," such as medications and doctors visits and setting a minimum drug formulary. The House has not acted on any similar legislation this Congress. (*Information gathered from CQ Today – Health, May 17, 2006*)

Congreso's Position

Congreso's *Esfuerzo* program offers care and education to the city HIV/AIDS population. It is in our organization's interest to maintain funding levels for urban areas and to continue to include palliative care and education as important areas to fund.

Congreso's Action

- This bill will be signed into law this year. It has bipartisan support. We need to make sure that urban areas are fairly considered when decisions are made on how to spend the monies committed to this reauthorization. Make sure our Senators (Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900) consider this when holding discussions with the members of the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions.

Federal Budget in the House

Summary

The House of Representatives reached an agreement on a Budget Resolution. (All of the Philadelphia based Representatives voted against it!) It passed by a vote of 218-210. The biggest concern is lack of funding for 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 more moderate representatives in the House received a "promise" that programs run by the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education *may* receive an addition of nearly \$7.2 billion beyond the President's figure. 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 cuts 2007 funding for domestic discretionary programs \$12 billion below the Senate-passed level, since no monies for increased domestic spending were actually included in this measure.

- The plan allows much larger tax cuts in 2007 through 2010 than are currently allowed.
- Despite its proposals to reduce domestic programs, the plan increases 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 was 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 and Senators (Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900) to demand that more domestic funding be added to the 2007 budget. The House budget needs to more clearly align with the Senate version. 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

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