


The background of the cover features several 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



June 1, 2007

Dear Fellow Pennsylvanians:

Summer is upon us. Schools are wrapping up their academic year; summer programs are kicked into high gear; state, federal and Philadelphia school budgets are constantly in the news; immigration is as hot as ever; and some of us are even considering summer vacations.

What we aren't hearing about too much about is the essential need for solid workforce development strategies in Pennsylvania. Organizations such as Pathways PA, Keystone Research Center, and the Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition are leading the charge in advocating for such. As a coalition partner, we thank these entities for researching and advocating for the need for a cohesive solution to bringing more Pennsylvanians into the middle class and into successful pathways.

The time is now for us to insist that the Commonwealth seek solutions for effective strategies that lead those in need toward sustainable employment. There are plenty of misconceptions in the state legislature about public funds are used for efforts like welfare-to-work. As advocates, we need to influence our policymakers to debunk those misconceptions and build workforce development efforts that work on long-term, sustainable answers. Answers that build our skilled employment base, while encouraging industry partnerships and comprehensive ways to address the multiple needs that many low-income workers and families now confront.

As a community, let's do our part to educate our legislators, to ensure that the Latino community continually moves toward economic prosperity.

As always, we look forward to your partnership.

Gracias,

Nicholas Torres
President, Congreso de Latinos Unidos



Civic Engagement Update

June 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.

Table of Contents

(click on the underlined titles to link directly)

[Workforce Development Strategies](#)

[Newsworthy](#)

Immigration
Economic Opportunities
Safety & Violence
Education
Health
Electoral Participation
State Budget
Federal Budget
Y Algo Más

[Important Dates](#)

[Important Links](#)

Contributions from the Latino community are always encouraged. Email them to shiplerk@congreso.net for inclusion.

Workforce Development – Preparing our Workforce for Sustainable Careers

Summary

In the last few years, many have noticed the vast, increasing gap between the 'have's' and the 'have nots'. The upper socioeconomic class has deeper and deeper pockets while the middle and lower socioeconomic classes' pockets are more and more shallow. From 2002-2006, corporate profits in the US increased by over 60%, while wages in Pennsylvania and in the US have been stagnant.¹ Many economic factors lead to this disparity, and public policy on the local, state and federal levels have great influence.

Advocates around the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States are coming together to fight this trend and seek funding priorities for methods in which to support the pathway of increased prosperity for all residents. Strategies often include business and industry partnerships for job training and preparation; attracting industry to certain geographical areas; and increased opportunities for education, so that our workers aspire toward career paths that secure healthcare and independence for their families.

General economic indicators for Pennsylvania's workforce are actually strong. A recent press release from Governor Rendell states that the statewide unemployment rate was 4.1 percent in April, which is below the national rate of 4.5 percent. Quite optimistic of this outcome, the Governor believes the long-term trends the administration is seeing are the result of very successful economic stimulus program investments that are improving the commonwealth's business climate. And we hope the administration will continue in this direction and do more!

PA Workforce Development Outlook

PathwaysPA and the Keystone Research Center partnered recently on a research study that resulted in "a policy agenda to help Pennsylvania's working families succeed". This study provides very helpful insights for policymakers and advocates alike, looking at the current strategies enacted in Pennsylvania and seeking ways in which to build and consolidate them to make the pathways to sustainability more effective. A few of those recommendations will be highlighted here, to equip Latino advocates to speak to the issues of policy needed to assist our working families move toward economic success.

Who are we talking about? The report sets the stage with an important picture of Pennsylvania's low-income, working families (those whose income is 200 percent below the federal poverty line, which provides for a family's basic needs without public assistance). **The economic indicators in the report that touch the Latino community include:**

- 44 percent of all minority working families are low-income, compared to 20 percent of all white working families.
- The percentage of low-income families is highest (more than 30%) in rural areas of the state and the city of Philadelphia (25% of Philadelphia's residents fall below the federal poverty line).
- Less than 7 percent of adults without a high school education or GED are enrolled in Adult Literacy programs; the need is great but access is very low.
- Pennsylvania ranks 47th out of 50 states in terms of having workers with more than a high school degree.
- Hispanics have underemployment (13.5%) and unemployment rates (7.2%) that are 67% higher than whites.
- Pennsylvania ranks 41st among states based on labor force participation for none-whites are compared to whites.

¹ "Restoring Middle Class depends on investing in the Future says New Economic Agenda", Keystone Research Center, 2007

So what do we do? First and foremost, we focus on education. As a starting point, advocates are correlating the importance of pre-kindergarten education to success as adults. Even pre-natal health and care affects a child's likelihood of educational success. Education has to be ever present, and in many forms.

80% of Pennsylvanians who have a Bachelor's degree or higher participate in the workforce. For those with less than a high school diploma, only 38.1% are engaged in the labor force. This shows that a Pennsylvanian is twice as likely to participate in the formal economy if s/he has post-secondary education. Again, education is key. Our legislators do not seem to understand how critical this is, given the levels of investment in our public schools. Debate has been raging in Philadelphia, for example, about the school budget. Whether the state is investing its fair share, and whether the city is owning up to its responsibility of our city's children. Advocates are pushing for increased state and city investment. Without it, Philadelphia's school district could face up to a \$182 million deficit. Parent groups are up in arms, knowing that this level of deficit will certainly affect the level of quality in the classroom. Lower quality in our K-12 education means less educated adults in our workforce.

Looking at **higher education**, advocates are focused on the benefit of federal tax credits for higher education costs. The tax credits are one of the more important vehicles for making college accessible to low-income and moderate-income families. These credits are also critical for making college access more equitable. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities put out a study June 1 that highlights how nearly 4 million prospective college students — or more than a fifth of all high-school-age children nationwide — cannot expect to receive any help from the credits because their families' incomes are too low. Pennsylvania ranks 5th in comparison of all states nationwide to have the largest number of high school students whose families will not benefit from these tax credits. The attached study and state-by-state breakdown show CBPP's advocacy to turn this dismal statistic around. <http://www.cbpp.org/6-1-07tax.htm>

On the **Adult Education and Literacy** landscape, Pennsylvania is faring even poorer. In the House of Representatives Education Committee, interests for basic education (K-12) and higher education (post-secondary) are represented. Yet Adult Basic Education is barely on the radar screen. This lack of emphasis is reflected in the low levels of investment in adult education and literacy on a state level. In comparison to the US average of \$46.65 spent per person, Pennsylvania spends less than half (\$20.46) per person for adult education and literacy. This dismal dollar amount is crippled even more given that 48% of Pennsylvanians are below basic or at basic adult literacy levels. As an example, Congreso has great difficulty accessing education programs for its clients who are below an 8th grade literacy level. Coupled with low English proficiency, many of our workers critically need increased access to education programs. Adult Basic Education programs that provide enough time for someone to increase his/her literacy level for GED preparation programs are sorely lacking. Our workforce desperately needs them. Community colleges partner with communities to provide these educational opportunities, but community colleges need to expand their funding to meet the demand. And this step can only be taken when community colleges are adequately funded. Outside of community colleges, corporate partners can also play a key role in supporting community literacy efforts. By doing so, they are investing in the improvement of our workforce.

Pennsylvania's local workforce investment boards (WIBs) play a key role in connecting workers with business and industry through Industry Partnerships (IPs). The WIBs identify through labor market studies those industries considered "High Priority Occupations". Bilingual nursing is one such occupation, since this career pays more than 200 percent of the poverty level and offers career advancement opportunities. State government could have a great impact on increasing private and public investment in IPs. Doing so would ultimately increase productivity and performance of business and industry and in turn leverage opportunities for our state's workers.²

Workforce development strategies do not stop at industry partnerships and education & training. Our most disadvantaged workers are also in need of wraparound supports which will free them to dedicate themselves more effectively to their careers. 96% of domestic violence survivors report work-related problems in Pennsylvania, and 70% of the population who are uninsured in Pennsylvania are actually working adults.

² Investing in Pennsylvania's Families: Economic Opportunity for All, www.pathwayspa.org, January 2007

Pennsylvania Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF is a federal strategy, restructured in 1996 and again revised in 2006, to bring people who are on welfare into the workforce. TANF in Pennsylvania has received a great deal of criticism lately at the hands of the media and some of our state legislators, especially the House Republican Policy Committee. At the brunt of the criticism is the Department of Public Welfare's spending for welfare-to-work clients. As noted in past updates, our state's work participation rate has gone from 7% just two years ago to a record 51.6 percent in April 2007. These workers are entering jobs paying an average of \$8.37 per hour and more than half of those jobs provide medical benefits.³ Many welfare-to-work clients are working, but some of our state legislators are giving the public the idea that most of TANF recipients eligible and fit for work rely on cash assistance. What their numbers aren't factoring in is that most cash assistance in the Welfare's budget (almost three-quarters) goes toward TANF assistance for children. Since December 2006, Pennsylvania has actually experienced a 5.5% drop in recipients receiving cash assistance through TANF. Only 3.2 percent of the Department of Public Welfare's budget is used for cash assistance.

And there are other myths that are making the media as well. While the committee has reported that more than 360,000 people were added to the welfare rolls during the Rendell Administration, they are neglecting to add that this is largely due to the growth in the state's Medicaid (aging) population, which is not part of our workforce.⁴ On a national level, in 1991 more than half of all low-income families with children received some TANF equivalent cash assistance. In 2005, only 2 out of 10 people received the same.⁵

Federal Outlook

The lack of federal funding for Adult Literacy and Workforce Development has certainly squeezed the state's ability to supplement federal funding for such programs. The Workforce Investment Act is up for reauthorization this year, but it has taken a back seat for many reasons. The level of funds needed to keep the United States involved in the Iraq War cripples domestic discretionary spending. As such, the government is faced with choosing among very basic services needed for the nation's workforce rather than strategizing how to build a comprehensive workforce and economic development policy.

The Workforce Alliance (TWA) is a national coalition of community-based organizations, community colleges, unions, business leaders and local officials advocating for public policies that invest in the skills of America's workers, so they can better support their families and help American businesses better compete in today's economy. TWA hosts state plans and reports that outline the states' workforce system, including links to required state plans and reports and a printable summary of funding, participant, and performance data from each state's workforce system for the most current year. Pennsylvania's can be found at <http://www.workforcealliance.org/site/c.cjNK1PJtH/b.1161843/k.8BB2/Pennsylvania.htm>

The Workforce Alliance, at the end of May, sent a letter to Senate and House leaders seeking attention for funding workforce development adequately. Specifically, the coalition is seeking funding from the FY 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill (which funds many domestic, discretionary programs). The letter seeks:

- \$4.16 billion for Job Training (WIA Title I) – which is the same as the FY05 funding level
- \$585 million for Adult Basic Education (WIA Title II) – more than 51 million of out-of-school youth and adults lack a high school diploma and *29 million need English language services*; and
- \$1.33 billion for Vocational Education (Perkins Act) – this funds community colleges and high schools for vocational/technical careers.⁶

³ "Department of Public Welfare achieves Historic Success in moving People from Welfare to Work", Press Release, May 24, 2007

⁴ "Welfare" Spending and Policies in Pennsylvania, PWC letter to the PA House of Reps., May 22, 2007

⁵ "Welfare Reform – The rest of the story", Editorial, Philadelphia Inquirer, June 2, 2007

⁶ Letter to Chairman David Obey, House Appropriations Committee, Workforce Alliance, May 29, 2007

All of these funding streams are critical for our community. What the federal government does not fund comes from state funds. And state funds, especially for adult basic education, are extremely limited.

One federal program that works in the favor of low-income families is another tax credit program. A big boon to the support created from government for low-income and working families has come from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), one of the largest poverty reduction strategies in the United States. From 1991 to 2005, the average EITC payment grew from \$400 to \$1,500 for a single parent household. One can only receive the EITC if s/he is working and files a tax return. The biggest challenge to the program is that many people who are eligible for this benefit do not apply. To see if you or someone you know qualifies, go to the IRS website for assistance: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96406,00.html>

¿Y Qué?

Senator Menendez recently articulated ways in which our economic outlook affects the Latino community. Critical to the Latino community are the women who are often the central figure for Latino families. As he states, “Latinas are the foundation of every home, many times caring for their children and working full-time jobs. However, Latinas are earning less and face increased challenges due to poverty and an increasing wage gap, which makes it difficult to achieve upward mobility. Despite high participation in our nation’s workforce, Latinas’ incomes and net worth remain much lower than non-Hispanic Whites, making them more likely to face poverty. Nearly one in three Latino families with children experience hardships such as overcrowded housing, risk of hunger, or lack of needed medical care; among Latino families living in poverty that number increases to 53 percent. Economic empowerment is critical.

- **Latinas Disproportionately Impacted by Wage Gap:** More than 40 years after the Equal Pay Act was signed into law, a study released in April by the American Association of University Women shows that women still bring in only 74 cents for every dollar their male counterparts make for the same work. Latinas fare worse than any other ethnic group, as *Latinas earn only 57 cents for every dollar non-Hispanic White men earn*. This means that for a Latina to earn what an average man earns over a forty hour work week, she would have to work more than 70 hours.
- **Latinas More Likely to Earn Minimum Wage:** Of all ethnic minorities, Latinas will benefit the most from an increase in the federal minimum wage. While African-American and Hispanic women represent approximately 24 percent of the female workforce, 33 percent would benefit from a wage increase. Moreover, *Latinas earning hourly wages make the lowest median hourly earnings out of all women*. Since 1997, the federal minimum wage has remained stagnant at \$5.15 an hour. At the same time, the cost of living has risen by 26 percent.⁷

Although contentious with industry on a national level, the federal government recently passed an increase in the federal minimum wage, from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour. Pennsylvania did so last year, and **as of July 1, Pennsylvanians are entitled to a minimum of \$7.15 per hour.**

To take this long overdue economic success even further, advocates are now seeking to index the Pennsylvania minimum wage so that it increases alongside the cost of living. We do not want to see another nine years pass before the minimum wage increases again.

Immigrants and the Workforce

There has been a lot of criticism of undocumented immigrants and how they take more from the economy than they give. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal debunks many aspects of this myth. Highlights of the article include:

- Between 1994 and 2004, the percentage of immigrant households collecting traditional cash welfare payments, supplemental security income, and food stamps fell by about half.

⁷ Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Empowering Latinas for Success, Latino Leadership Link, US Senator Robert Menendez’ office, May 11, 2007

- The decline in welfare use was more rapid for immigrants than for native-born Americans. The exception has been Medicaid, thanks to states that have increased immigrant eligibility for the state-federal program in recent years.
- Immigrants have a positive financial impact on Medicare and Social Security. This is because immigrants generally come when they are young and working. Seventy percent of immigrants are in the prime working ages of 20-54, compared to only half of the native-born American population. Only 2% of immigrants are over 65 when they arrive compared to 12% of natives.
- Social Security actuaries recently calculated that over the next 75 years immigrant workers will pay some \$5 trillion more in payroll taxes than they will receive in Social Security benefits. These surplus payments more than offset the costs of use of other welfare benefits received by most immigrant groups.
- According to Census data for 2005, immigrants who have just arrived have median household earnings of \$31,930, or about 30% below the U.S. average of \$44,389. But those in the U.S. for an average of 10 years have earnings of \$38,395; for those here at least 25 years the figure is more than \$50,000.⁸

Congreso Action

- Congreso supports our local workforce by advocating for increased corporate partnerships and funding for education and training programs; providing welfare-to-work, adult literacy, and Careerlink services to community members. Additionally, Congreso supports aspiring workers with services in housing, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and mental health among others.
- Congreso has signed onto “The Prescription for Prosperity: An economic agenda for Pennsylvania’s future”. Led by the Keystone Research Center, a coalition of over 20 organizations around the Commonwealth are promoting an economic plan to minimize economic disparity and link wages with productivity growth in Pennsylvania. The main tenets of the plan include:
 - Becoming a national model in education and skills development while investing in good jobs;
 - Enacting comprehensive healthcare reform and bolstering retirement security for all;
 - Indexing the minimum wage to inflation, improving jobs and career advancement in low-wage industries, and providing a refundable tax credit;
 - Lowering taxes to the middle class and raising revenues of those who can afford to pay them; and
 - Developing a long-term business plan to achieve growth and opportunity in Pennsylvania.

To sign onto this plan and become more involved, go to www.keystoneresearch.org.

- Congreso signed onto the Workforce Alliance’s letter recently to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, seeking increased investments and making new guarantees for workforce education and training.
- Congreso is a participating member of The Workforce Solutions Collaborative, whose mission is to offer an infrastructure to help employers attract or develop workers who have the foundation skills essential to high performance on the job. The Collaborative is a partnership between Philadelphia workforce education providers, employers, labor, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, and other organizations that have a stake in the quality of the region’s workforce.
- Congreso is also an active member of the Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition, which seeks as a coordinated body to advocate for persons who benefit from the protections offered by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and make TANF programs as effective as possible as a poverty alleviation strategy.

⁸ “Immigration and Welfare”, Wall Street Journal Editorial, May 24, 2007

Immigration

1. An immigration reform bill spawned and died within a 3 week timeframe in the Senate. On May 17, its introduction was announced, and by June 8, it flailed and did not survive debate and negotiation on the Senate floor. 60 votes were needed for cloture (the term used to decide to end debate and vote on a measure), and only 45 Senators voted for the motion. Specter and Casey both voted for cloture in the second vote (earlier in the day, Specter had voted against cloture).

Majority Leader Reid has now pulled the bill from the Senate floor, and the Senate is moving on to other issues for the time being. In response, President Bush is now personally calling on Senators, even in his own party, to continue the dialogue and come to compromise for a bill that works on security and reasonable worker provisions.

Advocates are still encouraged to **call our Senators (Specter at 202-224-4254) and (Casey at 866-802-2833) to thank them for voting for cloture and to encourage that they continue to prioritize comprehensive reform:**

- a. Congress must fix the broken immigration system this year and pass comprehensive immigration reform.
- b. Comprehensive immigration reform means providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have been working and paying taxes, but forced to live in the shadows.
- c. Comprehensive immigration reform means supporting family unity and protecting workers from exploitation.
- d. Comprehensive immigration reform means making sure immigrants come legally with a visa instead of with a smuggler.

National groups such as AILA www.aila.org, the National Immigration Forum www.immigrationforum.org, the National Immigration Law Center www.nilc.org, and Rights Working Group www.rightsworkinggroup.org have reactions to the inability of the Senate to move forward a comprehensive bill.

Even though the House of Representatives thought the Senate would move first on passing legislation, the Gutierrez & Flake's "Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy Act" (STRIVE Act) is still in the picture. Its main tenets focus on stronger border security, increased penalties for crimes committed by immigrants, a new employer verification program, visa reforms that will help reduce backlogs, and legalization of undocumented workers who pay a fine and pass extensive background checks. Back in May Democratic Leaders stated they expected a bill to be brought up in committee in June, expecting that the bill would go to the full House for a vote in July.¹³

2. One of the proposed anti-immigrant legislation introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives reached committee (HB 751) in early June, but was pulled due to the advocacy of various groups, including Congreso. **House Bill 751** would provide for a memorandum of understanding between the PA State Police and the United States Department of Justice of Department of Homeland Security. It has 46 sponsors (33 Republicans and 13 Democrats). It reached the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee. The Chair of that Committee is Representative Curtis Thomas (D-Phila) who is a co-sponsor of the bill.

Other bills that could also reach committee include:

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.

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.

⁹ "Crean Immigration Taskforce", Impacto Latin Newspaper, June 7-13, 2007

¹⁰ "Philadelphia leads big cities in murder rate", Philadelphia Inquirer, June 5, 2007

¹¹ "Budget Secretary identifies Causes of Philadelphia School District's Deficit, Recommends Corrective Action", Press Release, June 4, 2007

¹² "Governor Rendell signs First of two Executive Orders Implementing Rx for PA; Unveils Pennsylvania's first Diabetes Action Plan", Press Release, May 21, 2007

¹³ Standing Firm! Bulletin, Fair Immigration Reform Movement, April 2007

Immigration (continued)

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).

As a result of all of the negative activity and the push to move HB 751 in the PA House of Representatives, Rep. Angel Cruz has formed a bi-partisan Immigration Taskforce, which has the mission of working for one year to gather information relevant to the impact of immigration on the Commonwealth. Rep Cruz will be joined by Mark Cohen (D Phila.), Michelle Brooks (R Mercer, Lawrence & Crawford Counties), and Scott Perry (R Cumberland & York Counties), who will hold public hearings across the state, leading to a final report June 2008.

Sadly, at the same time, known anti-immigration legislator Daryl Metcalfe (R District 12), has announced the State Legislators for Legal Immigration, focused on the theft, drug trade, gang activity and terrorism of undocumented residents.⁹

3.The USCIS Office of Citizenship has launched **WelcometoUSA.gov**, an inter-agency web portal that presents a comprehensive range of federal resources and information for use by immigrants. At <http://www.welcometousa.gov/> constituents will find practical information on

- Immigration and Citizenship
- Education and Childcare
- Healthcare and Families
- Government Benefits
- About the United States
- Money and Finance
- Employment
- Emergencies and Safety

and locating federal government resources available to immigrants and the organizations that serve them. It also contains links to help new immigrants find an English class and links to www.volunteer.gov for information on ways to get involved in their communities.

4. A new article from the National Immigration Law Center focuses on a summary of state and local immigration ordinances and the abundance of them resulting from the lack of movement in the federal government around comprehensive reform. Affirmative efforts are highlighted as well. **“State and Local Policies on Immigrant Access to Services: Promoting Integration or Isolation?”**

http://www.nilc.org/immspbs/sf_benefits/statelocalimm_policies06-07_2007-05-24.pdf

5. Advocacy through 3,900 public comments affected some of USCIS’ decisions for increasing fees for their services, including the reduction in fees for some families applying for adjustment of status, expanding fee waiver and exemption eligibility, and permitting one free extension of approved orphan petitions. Regardless, **the fees for immigrants seeking residency and citizenship will increase as of July 30, 2007.**

USCIS expects that the revenue from the new fee structure will lead to a 20 percent reduction in average application processing times by the end of fiscal year 2009, and will cut processing times by the end of fiscal year 2008 for four key application types: the I-90 (Renew / Replace Permanent Resident Card), I-140 (Immigration Petition for Alien Worker), the I-485, and the N-400 (Naturalization). These four application types represent one-third of all applications filed.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus and others had encouraged USCIS to seek Congressional appropriations, like all other US government agencies rely on to provide services, but USCIS claims there isn’t enough interest in Congress to provide financial funding support for immigration services.

The new fee structure is posted at www.uscis.gov.

¹⁴ Governor Rendell joins Pennsylvania Mayors in a Call to Action against Gun Violence, Press Release, May 22, 2007

¹⁵ “Tom Brady named interim CEO of Philly schools”, Philadelphia Inquirer, by Martha Woodall, May 16, 2007

¹⁶ The Introduction of the Graduation Promise Act, www.nclr.org, Press Release, May 25, 2007

¹⁷ ¡Hágase ciudadano de Puerto Rico!, Impacto Latin Newspaper, May 24-30, 2007

¹⁸ Payton introduces bill that would create leadership opportunities”, El Hispano, 25 April – 1 May 2007

¹⁹ “THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PLAN: A Brief Analysis of the Conference Agreement”, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 29, 2007

²⁰ “Cost of General Assembly is \$23 per PA resident”, Brad Bumsted, Pittsburgh Tribune Review, May 10, 2007

Economic Opportunities

1. July 1st is fast approaching. This is an important date for those making minimum wage. **The minimum wage in Pennsylvania will increase to \$7.15 on July 1.** Please share this fact and ensure that you, your clients and community members receive this wage.

PA is ahead of the federal curve. But the federal government is trying to catch-up. Congress approved an increase in the federal minimum wage at the end of May. President Bush is expected to sign the bill quickly. Workers who now make \$5.15 an hour will see an increase in their paychecks by 70 cents per hour before the end of the summer. Another 70 cents will be added next year, and by summer 2009, all minimum-wage jobs will pay no less than \$7.25 an hour. So by summer 2009, the PA wage will increase by a dime!

2. **The Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board Releases A Tale of Two Cities.** This publication highlights the origins and implications of Philadelphia's current labor deficit and the repercussions it has on our city's economy and future.
http://www.pwib.org/news_events/news_events.php

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 LJN seeks to identify issues and approaches for juvenile justice reform specific to Latinos. If you are interested in joining either the Philadelphia or the Berks County partnerships, contact Lisa Varon at varonl@congreso.net.

2. A recent article that appeared in the Philadelphia Weekly on the LJN. The article articulates "Disproportionate Minority Contact" and how data collection can impact reform efforts for reducing racial and ethnic disparities.
<http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com/view.php?id=14664>

3. LJN member, Edwin Desamour of Women Organized Against Rape, was interviewed by Fox News for a great event he supported at **one of North Philadelphia's local school, gathering thoughts, art and ideas around violence from local school children.**
<http://www.myfoxphilly.com/myfox/pages/News/Detail?contentId=3375098&version=1&locale=EN-US&layoutCode=VSTY&pageId=3.1.1>

4. The **Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia** initiative has the mission of using proven, research-based public health methods to develop and implement a long-term strategy to help reduce gun violence and end youth homicides in Philadelphia by the year 2016. The multi-tiered Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Initiative includes influencing attitudes and changing community norms surrounding youth violence and uses social, cultural and educational programs as a way to prevent violence before it begins. An important subsection of the campaign was launched this year, the **GreatVine**, telling "the other side of the story." It's designed to counteract the many negative stereotypes of Philadelphia youth and young adults. It provides a new outlet for the voices of youth and young adults in the city; as a Blueprint partner, Congreso encourages increased Latino participation, so please encourage youth to become involved!

5. On May 22nd, Governor Edward G. Rendell joined with mayors from across Pennsylvania today to **call upon the General Assembly to address the growing trend of violence with common-sense gun laws.** The gathering shows that gun violence is not only an urban concern. In 2005, the rate of gun homicides rose twice as fast in the rest of the state as it did in Allegheny and Philadelphia counties. Eighty-three percent of all homicides in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Reading and York were committed with firearms. And, on average, more than one person is killed each day in Philadelphia, usually with a firearm.

The Governor is asking the General Assembly to:

- Help prosecutors lock up "straw purchasers" by requiring lost and stolen guns to be reported to law enforcement.
- Enable local communities to enact their own restrictions on the flow, distribution and use of handguns.
- Upgrade the penalty for possession of a stolen gun to a felony, and
- Reduce gun trafficking by enacting a one handgun a month law.¹⁴

Encourage these common sense strategies by calling your legislators: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>

6. Impacto Newspaper recently highlighted an important workshop held by the PA Immigration & Citizenship Coalition and supported with the participation of the Philadelphia Police Advisory Commission (PAC). The PAC has offered that anyone feeling as **if they have been treated poorly by the local police force should call 215.686.3991** to register a complaint and get assistance. There is bilingual staff at the PAC who can assist, and immigrants are encouraged to contact them, regardless of immigration status or language barrier.

Safety & Violence (cont.)

7. Just as the title of the article states, "**Philadelphia leads big cities in murder rate**". Per 100,000 residents in 2006, Philadelphia had 1,562 victims of violent crime. New York, in contrast, had 638. What is this attributed to? Criminologists claim that cuts in the federal budget and diversion of law enforcement resources to homeland security are at least partially to blame. Mayor Street's office, as a result of the study, is calling for stronger gun control laws and more support from the federal government. Socioeconomic causes were pinned as well: unemployment, a surge in gang activity, increased traffic in illegal guns, reductions in youth development programs, poverty and single-parent households.¹⁰

8. Join us in advocating for the federal reauthorization of **The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA)**! Congreso's Youth Advocacy Council and LJN Youth Sub-Committee is leading an effort to encourage leadership from Senator Specter to advocate for:

- a. Keeping children and youth out of the justice system;
- b. Ensuring equity and competence;
- c. Ensuring responses appropriate to a young person's age and stage of development; and
- d. Strengthening federal partnership with states.

Please contact Melissa Aguirre at 215.763.8870 x1407 for postcards and details.

Education

1. Parents United for Public Education have rallied parents around Philadelphia to promote public school investment increases on the part of the School Reform Commission, with difficulty. The parent group supports Councilman W. Wilson Goode's "Public Education Reinvestment Act.", which is a bill that would shift 1.58% of real estate taxes from the city to the School District of Philadelphia, a difference of almost \$19 million/year in permanent funds for the schools.

2. **Thomas M. Brady**, a recent addition to the School District of Philadelphia, **will replace CEO Paul Vallas** on July 1. The School Reform Commission voted him into the position, with critical reaction from Mayor Street and Governor Rendell. Their concerns lie in the fact that the vote was held without any advance notice to one of the appointees on the commission representing the City of Philadelphia.

Additionally, the chairman of the SRC had recently, publicly stated that the SRC would consult with the mayor and the Governor regarding any hiring or termination of

high-level administrators. Brady began his education career with the Fairfax County, VA Public Schools in 1999 as assistant superintendent for the Department of Facilities Services and then as their chief operating officer. He has most recently served as the chief business operations officer for the public school system in Washington, D.C.¹⁵

3. A new piece of legislation, created to combat the national high school drop-out crisis, was introduced by Senators Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, Richard Burr, R-NC, and Health, Education, Pensions and Labor Committee Chairman Edward Kennedy, D-MA. The U.S. Department of Labor projects that almost 90 percent of the fastest growing U.S. jobs require at least some postsecondary education. High school students living in low-income families drop out of school at six times the rate of their peers from high-income families, and only about 55 percent of Black students and **52 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time from high school** with a regular diploma, compared to 78 percent of White students.

Compared to other industrialized countries, the US ranks seventeenth in its high school graduation rates.

The GPA authorizes \$2.5 billion in new funding to:

- o Create a federal-state-local secondary school reform partnership focused on transforming the nation's lowest performing high schools;
- o Build capacity for high school improvement and provide resources to ensure high school educators and students facing the highest challenges receive the support they need to succeed;
- o Strengthen state systems to identify, differentiate among, and target the level of reform and resources necessary to improve low performing high schools and ensure transparency and accountability for that process;
- o Advance the research and development needed to ensure a robust supply of highly effective secondary school models for those most at risk of being left behind and identify the most effective reforms;
- o Support states to align their policies and systems to meet the goal of college and career-ready graduation for all students.¹⁶

Education (cont.)

4. Pennsylvania Budget Secretary Masch released a 43 page report **in early June exploring the recent years' deficits in the Philadelphia School District's budget.** The absence of standard management practices, including lack of controls, is cited as the main problems in balancing the budget. As a result, the School Reform Commission plans to institute recommendations by Masch that include five-year financial plans and quarterly reports. Even though the district has received increased funding over the years, it has still fallen short. The report outlines the increased costs for charter schools, payments for debt service, and special education costs as the reasons for the deficit. Secretary Masch's "Report on the Financial Situation of the School District of Philadelphia," is available online at: <http://www.budget.state.pa.us/budget/lib/budget/philadelphia>¹¹

Health

1. As a part of the Governor's **Prescription for Pennsylvania (HB 700)** the Governor signed two executive orders on May 21 to improve how Pennsylvanians with chronic disease receive health care in the future. As a result, a Chronic Care Management Commission will develop the process to effectively manage chronic disease across the state. To justify the commission, it was highlighted that about 78 percent of all health care costs is attributed to 20 percent of all patients, those with chronic diseases. The Commission will address prevention, detection and treatment.

The second order establishes the Office of Health Equity in the Department of Health, which will be charged with eliminating disparities in health care access and quality based on factors such as race, gender, geographic location and income, especially as these factors relate to chronic disease.¹²

The Philadelphia Unemployment Project, at (215) 557-0822 www.philaup.org is taking the lead on advocacy for the Prescription for PA initiative in the Philadelphia area. Contact them for more information.

2. During June the **Senate Agriculture Committee will assemble its version of the next Farm Bill.** Senator Casey has the opportunity to shape the Committee bill as one of its member. Please call him to encourage him to pay particular attention to the need to support the Food Stamp program. The Food Stamp Program affects nearly 10 percent of Pennsylvania households.

Additionally, before the summer recess, the House will likely debate and vote on its version. Each member of Pennsylvania's House delegation will participate.

The PA Hunger Action Center and PA Welfare Coalition led an effort to send letters to our House Representatives and Senator Casey, of which Congreso signed on. There is still time to encourage our legislators to support the Food Stamp Program. Just **call Senator Casey at 866-802-2833 or reach your House Rep at www.house.gov.**

Electoral Participation

1. **Philadelphia's primary elections** proved to be interesting at best. Not only did unexpected winner for Democratic Mayoral candidate, Michael Nutter, and Latina Maria Quinones-Sanchez grasp the 7th District City Council Democratic nomination (the district that is majority Latino), but local Latino organizations like Concilio, Latino Partnership and Congreso had election monitors out in force. Our volunteers serve to protect the rights of voters as well as provide communications and technical assistance at the polls. More than witnessing language access issues, Congreso's volunteers (based on the summary of our field reports) observed that the polls suffer from extensive electioneering and voter intimidation. We continue to advocate for stronger training and protection at the polls and will continue to work with the Board of Elections/City Commissioner's offices as well as the Committee of 70 to ensure a welcome environment for all voters. See <http://www.seventy.org/electioninfo/07elections/edayreport.html> for Committee of 70's summary report.

2. As of June 1, 2007, **Puerto Ricans are eligible to apply for Puerto Rican citizenship.** To see if you qualify and to get our certificate of citizenship, go to www.estado.gobierno.pr or go to the Department of State's Single Service Centers. With citizenship, you will have the right to vote in local Puerto Rican elections.¹⁷

3. Complementing Philadelphia's accomplishment of passing a ballot measure on May 15 to create a Youth Commission, State Rep. Tony Payton (D. Phila) introduced legislation (HB1127) last month that would encourage Pennsylvania's youth to provide leadership opportunities and become more involved politically and civically. It would **establish a Pennsylvania Youth Commission across PA** in 10 regions. Five youth from each region would be selected, and one of those youth would work with the House and Senate.¹⁸

State Budget

1. Welfare-to-work, Domestic Violence, Child Welfare, and other advocates have sought commitments from our State legislators to **protect services to low-income communities through the State budget appropriations process.** Increases in cost-of-living expenses for these types of programs are unlikely unless the Governor's Budget is considered and approved by the legislature. This is somewhat unlikely, considering the budget includes tax increases, a move that both chambers in both parties are hesitant to support. This is especially true given the reactions constituents had last year to the pay increase the General Assembly afforded itself; legislators do not want to align themselves with a measure that would take more from taxpayers.

As an example, the budget bill as passed by the House (102-97) includes language for a COLA for child welfare services purchased by counties, but only at a 2% level. Rep. Kathy Manderino introduced an amendment to increase this COLA to 3% for parity with other human services, but neither it, nor any of the other 245 amendments, was included in the version passed by the House. Link to HB 1286, the House Budget bill below: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?year=2007&sind=0&body=H&type=B&BN=1286>

PCCYFS reports that Republican members of the Senate and House continue to share that they hope to pass last year's budget, with a cost of living increase, and be done by the 4th of July. They want to pass a timely "bare-bones" budget, and if necessary pass supplemental budgets when they return in the fall. None of the Governor's proposed tax increases have enough support to pass, as of now. The deadline for passing the State budget on time is June 30th.

Federal Budget

1. On May 16, the **House and Senate reached agreement on a Congressional budget plan for fiscal year 2008.** The following day they passed the conference report, which is in effect as the approved fiscal year 2008 budget plan. Once finalized, the appropriations committees look to these resolutions to guide legislation that is the foundation of federal appropriations. It also looks as though these resolutions will total more than the figures in the President's proposed budget figures.

Senator Pelosi highlighted that the budget resolution provides tax cuts to middle-class families, reduces the deficit, follows 'pay as you go' principles, and balances the budget in five years.

Non-defense, discretionary programs in 2008 will likely be \$452.3 billion: \$1.7 billion less than what was proposed in the House-passed budget resolution and \$5.2 billion more than what was assumed in the Senate-passed plan. Although domestic funding could have fared far worse, it is lower than the average over the last dozen years or so.

Non-defense discretionary programs will likely be 3.6 percent of GDP, which is lower than the average of 3.8 percent since 1990.¹⁹

Y Algo Más

1. Congreso would like to extend a warm **welcome to Jose Molina, the new Latino Outreach Coordinator to the PA House of Representatives.** Jose has already reached out to multiple community members and organizations and is advocating for our community's needs. You can reach him by calling (717) 783-1630.

2. Lawmakers recently presented a proposal highlighting their feeling of alarm by **how much the Pennsylvania General Assembly spends on itself compared to legislatures of other large states.** The proposal seeks to reduce the size of the 253-member General Assembly.

In 2005, the cost of running the Pennsylvania Legislature was \$23 for every resident, compared to \$5.83 in Illinois and \$3.69 in Ohio, according to figures given by the National Conference of State Legislatures to the Speaker's Commission on Legislative Reform. California came in at \$8.20 per person and New York at \$10.72. Pennsylvania ranks first when comparing legislative costs as a percentage of all state spending. Pennsylvania ranked second in total legislative spending of \$286 million in 2005, according to the NCSL figures.

Another concern is how Pennsylvania's legislative staff has more than doubled from 1,430 in 1979 to 2,947 in 2003. Opponents of cutting the Legislature argue that lawmakers will add more district offices and staff if they have larger districts. Rep. Mark Mustio, R-Moon has sponsored a bill to reduce the Legislature to 201 members and he says his legislation would mandate a 20 percent cut in legislative spending. A similar bill by Sen. John Pippy, R-Moon, was approved by the Senate State Government Committee recently.²⁰

Y Algo Más (cont.)

3. A new resource guide for those non-profits interested in social change. Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide was developed for staff and board members of non-profit service organizations who are interested in learning how to incorporate progressive social change values and practices into their work. The guide introduces a step-by-step process that nonprofit organizations can use to identify how to address systemic problems through social change work within the context of their usual services and activities, and how to decide which strategies and actions will work best for them. It includes case examples, exercises, and resources to use along the way. If you are interested in finding out more or in ordering a copy of the guide, please visit <http://www.buildingmovement.org>.

4. Congreso has elevated its status in the May 2007 **Hispanic Business' Top 25 Hispanic Non-Profits**, to the 12th position. NCLR is found in the 9th position, and the Aspira Association is 3rd.
<http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/news/newsbyid.asp?id=63434>

Important Dates

- **June 18, 2007**

Philadelphia immigrant advocates will be hosting a group of 30-50 immigrants who will be coming from Boston and New York on their way to DC as part of *the DREAMER'S tour*, a sort of immigrants' rights freedom ride. More details to come!

- **June 27, 2007**

The next *PCCYFS Children's Services Policy Day* will be held at the Felicita Resort, Harrisburg, PA. PCCYFS Members will have the opportunity to engage in discussion with staff from various offices within the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare focusing on policy decisions guiding the delivery of services to children, youth and families. Contact PCCYFs by email at hbgoffice@pccyfs.org or call 800-882-8402 for more information.

- **July 16-18, 2007**

The Scholars in Service to PA Leadership Development Institute will bring together community service and service-learning professionals from across the state. The institute is designed to focus on building skills and techniques for volunteer training, group facilitation, and student development. This year, the Institute will be abbreviated and run as part of the National Conference on Volunteering and Service. (See more at: <http://www.volunteeringandservice.org/>) A limited number of scholarships are available. Apply at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=225883529398>. Submit the completed application by May 18, 2007. You will be notified of the status of your application on or before June 15, 2007. Questions, contact Jason Scott (215) 597-2715 / jscott@cns.gov.

- **July 21-24, 2007**

National Council of La Raza (NCLR) will hold its annual conference in Miami, FL. Save the Date! And see www.nclr.org for more information.

- **August 2, 2007**

The Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs Summer Luncheon, will be held in the Capitol East Wing in Harrisburg. RSVP by July 27 by calling 717.783.3877 or by email at ra-gacla@state.pa.us The monthly luncheon is a state gathering for the Latino community.

- **November 30-December 2, 2007**

The Dominican American National Roundtable (DANR) will hold its annual conference in Miami, FL. Save the Date! Email info@danr.org for more information.

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/>
- **Latino Leadership Alliance of the Lehigh Valley** <http://llalv.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

