

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

NEW

- Philadelphia School Budget**Pg.3
The School Reform Commission approved a \$2 billion operating budget for fiscal year 2007, which begins on July 1.
- PA State Immigration Issues**.....Pg. 4
Last week HB 2670 was introduced, which would make it a third degree felony to knowingly employ an undocumented immigrant.
- Newsworthy**.....Pg. 14
A new section highlighting other issues of interest and worth noting. Contests, tax cuts, and more!!

Table of Contents (includes updates and calls to action!)

Adult Education	Pg.3
Philadelphia School Budget.....	Pg 3
PA State Immigration	Pg 4
Minimum Wage	Pg. 4
State Budget.....	Pg. 5
Estate Tax.....	Pg 6
Marriage Amendment and Domestic Violence	Pg. 7
Immigration Reform-Federal.....	Pg. 7
Federal Budget	Pg 11
Ryan White Reauthorization – S2823.....	Pg. 12
Voting Rights Act HR 9.....	Pg 13

IMPORTANT DATES

- **June 25, 2006 3-4pm**
Holy Hour for Comprehensive Immigration Reform with His Eminence Cardinal Justin Rigali, Celebrant and Homilist, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, 18th and Ben Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia PA. Information is available at www.archdiocese-phl.org or contact Father Bill Ayres, Director of the Office for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees at 215-587-3540.
- **June 28, 2006 9:30am-1:30pm**
Congreso's "Smoke Free" Health Fair - Come to CONGRESO's Courtyard at 216 West Somerset St in Philadelphia for free massages, blood pressure checks, learn how to quit smoking, resources for pregnant women who want to quit smoking, and more. A fun event for the whole family so stop by and get information, gifts, and resources. For more information contact Francis Donato at 215.763.8870 x1412.
- **June 30, 2006**
Deadline to apply for the National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc. *HEALTH POLICY FELLOWSHIP*. Learn to advocate on Puerto Rican health policy issues in Washington, DC! See <http://www.bateylink.org/> for more information.
- **July 1, 2006**
Begins *Democracy Summer*, a nationwide effort led by the We Are America Alliance, to help eligible immigrants become naturalized citizens and register new voters - 1 million goal for the nation. Congreso's goal is 1,000 new voters by October 2006.
- **July 28, 2006**

Deadline for NCLR's Lideres de Hoy essay contest. (See the Newsworthy section!)

- **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- Current Issues

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, and we are meeting with CCP's leadership on this issue on July 5, 2006.
- 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.

Philadelphia School Budget

Summary

The School Reform Commission approved a \$2 billion operating budget for fiscal year 2007, which begins on July 1. A few of the highlights:

1. The central office has provided funding for 129 school growth teachers so that individual schools can free up funds for other purposes.
2. 119 teaching positions are restored overall.
3. Individual schools have been asked to reduce their budgets by 5% across the board.
4. Early childhood education programs (CECL, Pre-K, Bright Future, Head Start, Cradle to Classroom, and Parent Child Home) that currently serve 9,769 children will be expanded by 500 slots are expected to serve 11,000 students by 2008.
5. \$4 million was allocated to complete the standardization of the Pre-K through 12th grade curriculum, which was started in 2003.

To learn more about next year's budgetary highlights:

http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press_releases/2006/05

The Pennsylvania state legislature is still deliberating the state's fiscal year 2007 budget, and there is still a month left in the budgetary process. If the legislature approves Governor Rendell's education budget proposal, the Philadelphia schools will be able to restore some of the cuts made to schools' discretionary budgets.

Philadelphia Schools have also asked the City for \$10 million, for opening up its buildings to City and Parks Department sponsored recreational and other public programs. *This provides opportunity for Congreso to hold its summer school programs in public school buildings. An issue highlighted and resolved in the May 23, 2006 Civic Engagement update.*

STATE LEVEL – Current Issues

State Immigration – HB 2760

Summary

Several anti-immigrant measures are appearing in the Pennsylvania legislature. Last week, Representative Metcalfe introduced HB 2670, which would make it a third degree felony to knowingly employ an undocumented immigrant, and authorize district attorney's in Pennsylvania to investigate and prosecute violations. On Monday, June 19, 2006, the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee began considering HB 2670. Federal immigration law preempts any state or local government from imposing civil or criminal sanctions, exactly what House Bill No. 2670 proposes to do. Representative Metcalfe is also expected to introduce another bill which would deny any non-emergency public benefit to illegal immigrants. Another anti-immigration measure is a proposal to ban illegal immigrants from living in Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

Congreso's Position

Congreso agrees with PICC that such PA legislation is not legally enforceable, thus consideration of this bill is a diversion of energy that could be expended on other issues like our state budget. Enactment of such a bill would likely subject the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to unnecessary litigation by affected employers. It is a waste of taxpayers' money to defend against legislation that is clearly prohibited by federal law. We are working on employment verification on the federal level.

Congreso's Action

- Please take immediate action by calling or faxing Representatives. An action alert with talking points and a list of Representatives on the committee is below and attached. The 2 page talking points can be faxed to representatives, with a short note.
- Contact the Speaker of the House, the Honorable John Perzel at 717-787-2016.
- Contact the Majority Leader, the Honorable Samuel Smith at 717-787-3845.

Minimum Wage Increase – HB 257 & SB 1090

Summary

SB 1090 (Senator Tartaglione's bill) was reported out of the Labor and Industry Committee on June 19, 2006. It was amended to remove large numbers of low wage workers from coverage by the minimum wage and would only raise the minimum wage to \$6.30 on Jan. 1, 2007 and \$6.65 on Jan. 1, 2008.

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

- **Contact your State Senators** <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/find.cfm> and let them know that they should support the Tartaglione amendments on the floor of the Senate. These amendments will make the Senate bill have the same language as the bill that passed the House in April, with a \$6.25 minimum July 1, 2006 and \$7.15 on July 1, 2007.
- The "Raise the Minimum Wage Rally & Lobby Day" in Harrisburg was on June 5th with 400 participants. 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

A hearing on "Cover All Kids" Legislation is scheduled in Room 8E-B of the Capitol's East Wing on June 21. The committee will hear testimony on bills (Senate Bill 1192 and House Bill 2697) introduced by Senate Democratic Leader Robert J. Mellow (D-Lackawanna) and state Rep. Michael Sturla (D-Lancaster) that would provide health insurance coverage for Pennsylvania's 133,000 uninsured children.

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.

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed a budget bill that stripped out \$59.5 million for child care. With action now shifting to the Senate the challenge is to ensure Pennsylvania does not lag behind in quality and access for low-income children.

Under the Governor's 2007 budget, an additional 28,000 children would be served in a variety programs, including Head Start, child care, and Early Intervention. Specifically, the Governor has proposed:

- A \$15 million increase in state funding of Head Start for a total of \$45 million in state funding. This would increase enrollment in Head Start by 1,500 children, raising the total number of children served by the state to 6,200.
- Increased funding of the Education Accountability Block Grant by \$50 million, for a total state investment of \$250 million. School districts have primarily used the block grant for pre-kindergarten, funding full-day kindergarten, and decreasing class sizes in grades K through 3.
- \$59.5 million in increased funding for child care access and quality initiatives, for a total commitment of \$663 million in State dollars. These funds would expand access to child care subsidy for 16,000 more children, for an expected total of 220,000 children served. \$47 million of these funds would be used for the Keystone STARS quality improvement program.
- Increased funding for Birth-to-Five Early Intervention by \$27 million, for a total state investment of \$332 million and an additional 5,000 children served, bringing the total of 71,000 children served. Early Intervention provides children services and supports, including health care, skill development and social services. These services are intended to minimize developmental delay and decrease the need for special education.

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 supports the governor's budget and encourage elected officials to find the political will to take action in support of the investments in early learning.

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!

Estate Tax

Summary

Last week the Senate voted to oppose the estate tax repeal. Now members of the Senate are working on alternatives that could be almost as bad. The vote affirms that there are not 60 votes in the Senate for full repeal of the estate tax. However, both Republicans and Democrats seeking reductions in the estate tax are continuing to work on proposals short of full repeal that could be brought up at any time if an agreement is reached that is supported by 60 Senators. Alternatively, the Republican leadership could choose to attach estate tax repeal to conference committee reports of other bills on their way to final passage in the House and Senate. Such a move could be problematic because members may not want to vote against the base bill.

Congreso's Position

Congreso opposes repealing the estate tax. Gutting or repealing the estate tax is one of the most unfair tax cuts ever dramatically reducing many of the services that serve the Latino community. Please help our voices grow stronger: The estate tax helps us invest in the future for all Americans; repealing it lavishes help on a handful of millionaires.

Congreso's Action

- Congreso was one of over 740 national, state and local organizations to sign a letter to the Senate on June 1 opposing repeal or changes that drastically reduce revenue from the estate tax.
- Continue to contact our Senators to ensure the estate tax repeal decision does not get watered down by other provisions. Senator Specter 202-224-4254/215-597-7200 and Santorum 202-224-6324/215-864-6900

Marriage Amendment & Domestic Violence

Summary

The “Marriage Protection Amendment (HB 2381)” passed the Pennsylvania House of Representatives June 6, 2006 and has been sent to the Senate. This amendment potentially takes away basic, existing legal protections and benefits for unmarried gay or straight persons. In other states, as soon as similar amendments have passed, they have been used to take away health insurance or even protections against domestic violence. 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

- Call your State Senator <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/find.cfm> and urge her/him to oppose the Marriage Protection Amendment.

FEDERAL LEVEL Current Issues

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

Summary

S. 2611, the immigration bill passed by the Senate, is due to go into conference committee with H.R. 4437, the House immigration bill. However, there is a procedural problem. Those that would qualify for legalization under the Senate bill must pay back taxes, fines, and fees - generating revenue. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that the Senate bill would generate \$66 Billion in revenue from 2007 – 2016.

Under the Constitution, the House of Representatives has the sole authority to originate bills that generate revenue, and can block any Senate bill which steps on their toes. The House sends notice on a blue slip of paper, thus the term “blue-slipping.” The House has chosen to object to the Senate bill on these procedural grounds.

Conferees will not be named until this issue is resolved.

Senators are working out the details to overcome this issue. In a recent strategy call, Senator Kennedy (D-MA) said they were hoping the issue would be resolved within the next week so that conferees could be announced before the July 4 recess.

Meanwhile, Congressman Sensenbrenner announced his intention to have the conference committee process be open, to foster public debate. Conference committees are only required to have one public session. Sensenbrenner, the lead sponsor of H.R. 4437, chairs the House Judiciary Committee and will be a leading member of their conference committee delegation. *(received from PICC)*

The Senate's Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill:

Highlights

The bill recognizes the value of the work of our undocumented population and provides many more legal opportunities for family unification and for immigrants coming here to work.

- Legalization program: An estimated 8 to 8.5 million undocumented immigrants will be able to come out of the shadows and be put on a path to permanent residence.
- AgJOBS included: A million undocumented agricultural workers would be put on a path to permanent residence through provisions targeted to these workers.
- DREAM included: Undocumented immigrant students will be put on a path to citizenship and so will be able to continue on to college along with their classmates.
- Significant increase in family visas: The family-based immigration system will be updated to speed family unification. It is expected to clear the backlog for family unification in approximately six years.
- Significant increase in employment visas: Employment-based visas are more than doubled to more realistically allow immigrants to come legally in the future to work.
- A new temporary worker program: The bill provides temporary visas to allow 200,000 persons to come legally each year and take jobs that are not being filled by American workers. This program includes worker protections, gives workers the ability to change employers, and provides a path to permanent residence for those who want to stay.

(The various legalization provisions and provisions for future flow may apply to the same individuals, so the above numbers cannot be added together, because the total would include some double-counting.)

Lowlights

The bill contains many enforcement provisions that are symbolic, mean-spirited, unworkable, and will do little to make our country secure or our immigration system orderly.

- Some undocumented ineligible for legalization or unlikely to come forward: An estimated 2.5 million to 3 million undocumented immigrants will not be eligible to legalize or may be afraid to come forward because they arrived after the bill's cutoff date, or because certain provision in the law will make it risky for some undocumented immigrants to reveal themselves.
- Language hurdle to legalization: Undocumented immigrants who are legalizing will have to meet the same requirements for English and Civics knowledge as someone who is applying for citizenship.
- Flooding of FBI lookout list with non-criminal immigrant names: The bill would require that information on immigrants who are confirmed to be out of status be put in the National Crime Information Center database. This database is used by local police to find wanted criminals and the bill will flood the database with hundreds of thousands of names of immigrants who have not committed a criminal act.
- Punishment out of proportion to crime: the bill contains a number of provisions that will trip up immigrants even if they commit only minor offenses and expose them to indefinite detention or permanent exile from their families and adopted country.

- Wall and National Guard on the border: The bill calls for at least 370 miles of fence on the U.S.-Mexico border, and codifies the President's request to put National Guard troops in border regions in support roles for border enforcement officials.
- Reduced access to justice: A number of provisions in the bill will reduce the ability of immigrants to have their day in court when subject to a bad government decision including arbitrary or indefinite detention.
- Put asylum seekers in harms way: The bill would subject asylum seekers to prosecution if they use false documents as their last resort to gain entry into the U.S. as they are fleeing persecution as well as summarily return them to face further persecution without fair judicial process. [check with Shoba as this may be in the managers amendment]
- Undermine the ability of government agencies to communicate with immigrants: A provision added to the bill making English the national language will make it more difficult for the federal government to effectively communicate critical information ; and
- Undermine Public Safety: Having state and local police enforce complicated immigration laws would discourage immigrants from coming forward to report crimes whether they are the victim or a witness.
- Penalize legalizing immigrants paying back taxes: A last-minute amendment to the bill creates significant hardship for many legalizing immigrants by denying them access to a number of tax credits -- including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) -- for the years prior to 2006. Immigrants who have to pay past tax obligations as part of the legalization process could face prohibitively high tax payments, potentially putting legalization out of their reach.

How the House and Senate versions of immigration reform compare:

Senate

-Allows illegal immigrants who have been in the country five years or more to remain, continue working and eventually become legal permanent residents and citizens after paying at least \$3,250 in fines and fees, back taxes and learning English.

—Requires illegal immigrants in the U.S. between two and five years to go to a point of entry at the border and file an application to return.

—Requires those in the country less than two years to leave.

—Illegal immigrants convicted of a felony or three misdemeanors would be deported no matter how long they have been in the U.S.

—Creates a special guest worker program for an estimated 1.5 million immigrant farm workers, who could also earn legal permanent residency.

—Provides 200,000 new temporary “guest worker” visas a year.

—Authorizes 370 miles of new triple-layered fencing plus 500 miles of vehicle barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border.

—Authorizes hiring an additional 1,000 Border Patrol agents this year, for a total additional 3,000 agents this year.

—Adds another 14,000 Border Patrol agents by 2011 to the current force of 11,300 agents.

—Authorizes additional detention facilities for apprehended illegal immigrants.

—Requires employers and subcontractors to use an electronic system within 18 months to verify new hires are legal. Increases maximum fines to employers for hiring illegal workers to \$20,000 for each worker and imposes jail time for repeat offenders.

—Delays by 17 months, until June 1, 2009, a requirement now in law that Americans re-entering the U.S. after cruises or short visits to Canada and Mexico show a passport or high-tech identification card.

—Declares English the country's national language.

—Increases the number of H1-B visas for skilled workers from 65,000 to 115,000 annually, beginning in 2007. Immigrants with certain advanced degrees would not be subject to the caps, which could rise by 20 percent depending on labor market demands.

—Limits National Guard tours of duty on the U.S.-Mexico border to 21 days.

—Allows additional countries to participate in the visa waiver program, which allows citizens of certain countries to

visit the U.S. without a visa. The United States and more than two dozen countries now have reciprocal visa waiver agreements.

House of Representatives

—No provisions providing path to legal residency or citizenship for illegal immigrants. No new temporary guest worker program.

—Makes illegal presence in the country a felony and increases penalties for first-time illegal entry to the U.S.

—Makes it a felony to assist, encourage, direct or induce a person to enter or attempt to enter or remain in the United States illegally.

—Beginning in six years, all employers would have to use a database to verify Social Security numbers of all employees.

—Increases maximum fines for employers of illegal workers from current \$10,000 to \$40,000 per violation and establishes prison sentences of up to 30 years for repeat offenders.

—Requires mandatory detention for all non-Mexican illegal immigrants arrested at ports of entry or at land and sea borders.

—Establishes mandatory sentences for smuggling illegal immigrants and for re-entering the U.S. illegally after deportation.

—Makes a drunken driving conviction a deportable offense.

—Requires building two-layer fences along 700 miles of the 2,000-mile border between Mexico and the United States.

*To see President Bush's discussion on June 1 about immigration:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/20060601.html>

Congreso's Position

Congreso opposes Anti-immigrant enforcement-only proposals like Sensenbrenner-King (HR 4437) and advocates that the final bill for comprehensive immigration reform includes:

- 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

- The House of Representatives announced on June 20 that they intend to hold hearings this summer, around the country, on immigration reform. This action will result in stalling negotiations with the Senate; unjust considering that the House and Senate have already passed their own forms of legislation. Call your Representative to insist on pushing through immigration reform. Find your representative at <http://www.house.gov/>
- Congreso has sent Senator Specter a letter of thanks for his leadership in ushering comprehensive reform forward.
- **Call Senator Specter to say Thank You! Call the DC office at (202) 224-4254**
Tell him:
** I support comprehensive immigration reform
** Thank you for your leadership on comprehensive immigration reform, and your strong support during floor debate
** Please continue to support comprehensive reform in conference committee

- 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.

Federal Budget - General

Summary

On June 7, a House Appropriations Committee panel approved the FY 2007 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill that we reported on May 23, 2006. The bill provides \$141.9 billion in discretionary (appropriated) funding for a variety of domestic social service programs. This is a .6% increase over the \$141.1 billion provided in FY 2006, and it's insufficient to keep pace with inflation.

The bill includes a number of program cuts affecting low-income individuals, including a \$1 billion cut for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a \$550 million cut for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), a \$200 million cut for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and a \$90 million cut for Head Start.

The bill is expected to be considered on the House floor on June 21 or 22. The Senate, which may provide additional funding for many of the programs covered by this bill, is likely to take up the measure in July or the early fall. Due to expected differences between the House and Senate, final action on the bill is not expected before the November elections.

Senator Specter, along with Senator Harkin, has proposed an amendment that would increase the President's request for domestic discretionary spending linked to Labor/HHS/Education line items by \$7 billion. In and of itself, this is a "modest" investment as it leaves many programs still operating at 2005 spending levels. See <http://www.chn.org/humannneeds/060616c.html> for more.

** Note that in this bill, an amendment was included to raise the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 by January 2009. The increase passed, 32 to 27. Chances are the House leadership will try to drop the minimum wage provision before it gets to the House floor. There's another attempt at raising the federal minimum wage, though. Senator Kennedy (D-MA) will try to do the same as an amendment to the Defense Authorization bill. A vote is expected to occur on Wednesday June 21. See http://www.cepr.net/pressreleases/2006_06_19_graph.htm for background on the rise and fall of the federal minimum wage.

Congreso's Position

Congreso opposes domestic social service reductions to the budget.

Congreso's Action

- Call Senator Specter at 202-224-4254 or 215-597-7200 to thank him for advocating for domestic spending! Call Senator Santorum to ask for the same.
- 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 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.

Victims of Crime Act and Violence Against Women Act

Summary

Federal government is still Seeking to Drain VOCA Fund in '08 and Shrink them in '07. Recent DOJ projections indicate that the Administration's FY 2007 budget request (in addition to their attempt to rescind the Crime Victims Fund balance in '07) could result in a serious reduction in VOCA state victim assistance grants this coming year. The Administration is requesting the cap on the Crime Victims Fund be set at \$625 million. By itself, that is likely to result in a reduction in state VOCA victim assistance grants of \$36 million (or 9 percent) from FY 2006.

It also appears that the Administration is proposing to include the \$50 million Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve under the cap. [Note: this reserve is to be used in cases of terrorism or mass violence, and in the past has been replenished, as needed, from VOCA's pool of unobligated revenue, or "fund balance" – and not the amount set aside with each year's capped appropriation.] Doing that means a cut of \$83 million (or a 21 percent) cut in state victim assistance grants.

Congreso's Position

Maintain the 2006 funding level for state victim assistance grants. In order for this to happen, we need to ask that Congress set the FY 2007 cap at least at \$665 million – excluding the Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve.

Congreso Action

Contact respective members of the House and Senate – especially those on four key appropriations subcommittees. To read more and/or sign on go to: www.trynova.org/releases/20060528-vavavoca-links.html

Head Start Funding

Summary

Attempts are moving to provide at least \$234 million in additional funding for Head Start in 2007, to restore cuts made in FY 2006 and provide a cost of living increase.

At present, only half of the eligible children are able to access Head Start due to funding shortfalls. If the 2006 cuts are not restored, Head Start programs will be forced to reduce the number of children served even further and cut back on the education and social services that have become the hallmark of Head Start.

Congreso's Position

Support additional funding for Head Start in 2007 to restore cuts made in FY 2006

Congreso's Action

Our agency signed onto a letter supporting additional funding.

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.

Voting Rights Act – HR 9

Summary

Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) and Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH), have indicated that they intend to bring H.R. 9 to the floor next week. 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

Join NCLR's efforts to get affiliates from around the country to call toll-free (866) 808-0065 to Reps. Hastert and Boehner and your House Representative. Urge them to use their leadership positions to bring H.R. 9 to the floor "as-is" and to ensure that H.R. 9 passes without amendment.

Newsworthy

1. **REGISTER TO VOTE!!** Congreso is involved as the Pennsylvania representative to National Council of La Raza's "Latino Empowerment & Advocacy Project", and we have the goal of registering 1,000 voters in time for the November elections. If you, your family members or clients have changed names, addresses or haven't voted in a while, you need to register again. If you haven't registered before, you need to do so. Your voice matters, and we have important elections in Pennsylvania this year. Come to Kristin Shipler, Director of Civic Engagement, to fill out your registration form. Contact her at shiplerk@congreso.net or at 215.763.8870 x1505.

2. To give **comment to the national, public debate on Federal Healthcare**, go to www.citizenshealthcare.gov. They are seeking input on the interim recommendations that were developed based on healthcare forums that were held around the country.
3. The Department of Health & Human Services has issued guidelines for states to implement a new requirement, effective July 1, that **persons applying for Medicaid actually document their citizenship** (rather than checking off a box that verifies they are citizens). The new documentation requirement is mandated by Section 6036 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) and is intended to ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries are citizens without imposing undue burdens on them or the states. http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MedicaidEligibility/05_ProofofCitizenship.asp **It is important to note that non-citizens still have the same rights to Medicaid and will follow the same eligibility rules that were in place prior to passage of this law. Non-citizens should NOT be denied Medicaid based on failure to produce proof of citizenship.** As of July 1, the same may be required of children in foster care.
4. Read NCLR's new 20 Frequently Asked Questions about **Hispanics in the US:** http://www.nclr.org/files/1466_file_FreqAskedQuests_6_06_FNL.pdf
5. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and Allstate are once again recognizing Hispanic youth who make a difference in their communities with the second **Líderes de Hoy** national essay contest. Twelve winners will be chosen this year – six from high school and six from college. One grand-prize winner from each age group will receive a \$10,000 scholarship for educational expenses. The ten remaining students will each receive a \$5,000 scholarship. **Deadline is July 28!!** <http://lideres.nclr.org>
6. The Pennsylvania legislature has passed a bill to deliver **\$ 1 billion in property tax cuts** to the people of Pennsylvania — the largest local tax cut in the commonwealth's history. This will especially benefit the elderly. <http://www.governor.state.pa.us/governor/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=445952>

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