



STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2007

From the President



Dear Friends,

There are many obstacles that we confront on a daily basis. Yet, with the leadership and fortitude of groups like NHCSL, we can make those obstacles smaller and smaller. We should continue working with

one goal in mind, to eliminate the barriers and create more opportunities for Hispanics, especially in education, health and economic development.

On the education front, I am delighted to report that we have implemented the NHCSL-Comcast Education Initiative. This effort will include scholarships and internships to more Hispanic students. I hope you will join me to help make this program a success as we strive to provide more opportunities for our children.

From a health perspective, we need to press for programs like the Healthy States Initiative to address the increasing rate of a very serious issue which confronts our children, obesity. Obesity has so many negative effects on our children, both psychological and physical, yet it is something, we can reduce with a common sense approach.

In this issue we are highlighting the accomplishments of Arizona Senator Amanda Aguirre. She has led the way in a series of challenging policy issues which we all can learn from. She is a special legislator who recognizes the value of working together, and we honor her work here.

Finally, I am pleased to officially announce that the NHCSL 5th National Summit will be held in Miami, FL, on November 15 - 18th.

As always, I welcome your questions, comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact me directly.

Assemblyman Felix W. Ortiz
NHCSL President

NHCSL Hosts 5th National Summit

In November the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators will gather its members from across the country to convene in Miami, Florida for the 5th National Summit. This milestone anniversary for NHCSL marks five years of the Summit where a diversity of state elected officials and high-ranking policy experts have engaged, over the years in discussions that impact the Hispanic community.

The creation of the Summit was the brainchild of former NHCSL president, Representative John S. Martinez (CT). Martinez was NHCSL President from 2001 until his untimely death in 2002. His vision of the Summit was to position NHCSL as a powerful leadership organization on public policy issues and establish a public forum for Hispanic state legislators to come together in a unified way. The NHCSL Summit is also a forum that recognizes the accomplishments of its membership and also provides the state legislators with unique opportunities to dialogue with their colleagues to share best practices and models of examples.

As a result of this vision, NHCSL is recognized as a leading national Hispanic organization and through the Summit, continues to tackle some of the most prevalent issues that cut at the core of the Hispanic community. Issues ranging from chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and hypertension to teens and mental health, depression and suicide, have been addressed at the Summit gatherings.

Said Ortiz, "For NHCSL it is imperative that we engage our state legislators in the public policy process and work together to identify appropriate solutions to the numerous problems that affect their constituents."



Martinez' successors, former Senator Paul Feleciano (KS) 2002-2003, Senator Leticia Van de Putte (TX) 2003-2005, and current president Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (NY) since 2006, continue to expand on the vision and mission of NHCSL through the Summit activities.

Today, the Summit generates a record attendance of more than 200 individuals

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* Q&A: MEET THE LEGISLATOR

AMANDA AGUIRRE, ARIZONA STATE SENATOR



Amanda Aguirre

Since 1991 Amanda Aguirre, M.A., R.D. has been the CEO/President of the Regional Center for Border Health, Inc. a non-profit organization. She also serves as CEO/President for the San Luis Walk-In Clinic, Inc. a subsidiary non-profit Federal Rural Health Clinic of the Regional Center for Border Health, Inc. since 2004. Senator Aguirre has been involved for more than 25 years in public health education and administration with a strong emphasis in U.S.-Mexico border health issues.

After serving for two terms in the Arizona House of Representatives, on December 4, 2006, Senator Aguirre was elected to the Arizona State Senate for District #24, 48th Arizona State Legislature. She became the first female and first Hispanic ever elected to this position from District #24. Senator Aguirre, currently, serves in the following Senate Committees: Appropriations, Health and Natural Resources & Rural Affairs. In 2004, Arizona's Governor Napolitano appointed Senator Aguirre to the Arizona Homeland Security Council.

Q: What are the current pressing health issues in Arizona and other states along the U.S.-Mexico border?

A: The most pressing public health issues, along the U.S.-Mexico border are; public safety and underage drinking, uninsured population, accessibility and affordability of healthcare, chronic illnesses (Diabetes and Cardio Vascular Disease), communicable diseases (STDs, Tuberculosis), dental care, mental health, and substance abuse.

Q: Tell me about any new initiatives being proposed or that have been implemented in Arizona to address the needs of the growing Latino community.

A: Several initiatives that are being proposed or implemented include:

Small business loans for minority population -- Often, the Latino small business community has limited access to credit and loans by traditional banking institutions. This is an important step in assuring that the Latino small business person will have the opportunity to improve their ability to succeed and compete in Arizona.

Affordable Housing -- It is important that our working families both low and middle income have the opportunity to afford the "American dream" to own their home. This can only be done by increasing salary wages and making sure that affordable housing is available in our communities. In 2006, the voters in Arizona approved a measure-

ment to increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.75.

Increase funding for higher education financial aid -- State funding for higher education in Arizona has increased very little in the last 10 years, thus giving the state universities little or no choice but to increase tuition rates. Economically disadvantaged and minority students in Arizona are faced with the challenge of being able to afford higher education. The Arizona State Legislature is proposing to get rid of the gag order to allow our State AHCCCS to provide KidsCare (Arizona SCHIP) outreach in schools -- This initiative (SB1440) will allow the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) administration to collaborate with community based organizations, faith based organizations, school districts for KidsCare outreach related functions.

Increase prenatal care to uninsured women -- Bringing it from 133% FPL to 185% FPL for AHCCCS eligibility (SB1361) raises the income level for AHCCCS eligibility for pregnant women. It is estimated that in Arizona the number of uninsured women between 14 and 44 years of age is approximately 35,350. In any one year the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) estimates the percentage of women giving birth is 7.61%; therefore resulting in an eligible pregnant population of approximately 2,690 women per year.

HPV vaccine outreach and education appropriation to the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) (SB1437) -- This initiative appropriates \$200,000 to ADHS for outreach education on the HPV vaccine and allows for ADHS to sub-contract with non-for profit groups for outreach efforts.

Q: Since the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) policies to "secure" the U.S.-Mexico border have increased immensely. Is there a correlation (i.e. positive or negative) between the DHS and Latino public health as a result?

A: Violence along the border has increased. Violent acts against illegal immigrants, as well as drug trafficking by immigrants have increased since more border law enforcement has been placed at the border to stop illegal immigration. In 2001 after the terrorist attacks on our U.S. soil, the U.S. border with Mexico needed to be more secured. This effort put pressure on the "coyotes" human traffickers to resort to more violent acts, creating dangerous situations for the families being smuggled and residents in the State of Arizona.

In addition, the Mexican communities along the U.S. Mexico Border have been used for a long time as a safety net for primary care for the uninsured population in particular the Latino population. Due to the shortage of healthcare professionals and an increased number of medically underserved border communities, compounding with the increase in healthcare cost in Arizona more families and particular uninsured/underinsured Latino families have opted to cross the border to seek affordable healthcare and prescription medications. It is estimated that one million people in the State of Arizona are uninsured.

By Jose Saavedra, Intern

NHCSL LAUNCHES SCHOLARSHIP INITIATIVE

In April, NHCSL launched the implementation phase of its education initiative with Comcast. The initiative is a part of NHCSL's "Closing the Achievement Gap" to help Hispanic students attain educational success. Through a \$150,000 Comcast grant, NHCSL will award scholarships and internships that will provide students with meaningful work experience and learning opportunities in the public service arena. The target states for this year include Colorado, Florida, Illinois and Maryland. NHCSL will work with Hispanic state legislators in the target states to ensure that junior and senior

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Hispanic Youth Need a Healthy Pathway to Prevent Chronic Illness

What does the phrase “living long and living well” mean to Hispanic/Latino youth? Can young Hispanics meet this goal? Yes, if they establish healthful lifestyles early in life, including eating right and exercising regularly.

Facts

- In some communities, almost half of pediatric diabetes cases are type 2 diabetes, which is influenced by poor diet and lack of exercise and once was believed to affect only adults.
- In one large study, 61 percent of overweight 5- to 10-year-olds already had risk factors for heart disease and 26 percent had two or more risk factors.
- Overweight children have a 70 percent chance of being overweight as adults—facing higher risks for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke and several types of cancers.

Some legislators are concerned that the idea of living long and living well is not being taken seriously among today’s Hispanic/Latino youth. There are many things standing in the way of a healthy lifestyle for them: little or no parental guidance, busy schedules with school and extra-curricular activities, a sedentary lifestyle on the computer or in front of the TV, and they are even besieged by snack and soda vending machines at schools. It is

not surprising to see an increasing rate of obesity and diabetes among the young.

“These are serious health issues that we cannot ignore, not only because of the suffering of the children, but also because of the toll on our health care system, our schools and our future work force. Obesity and diabetes are very difficult and persistent problems in youths and adults in our society,” said New York State Assemblyman Felix Ortiz, president of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators.

Obesity can run in families, but just how much is due to genetics and how much is due to the environment people are raised in is hard to determine. Eating habits are learned at a young age. Families eat the same foods, have the same habits (like snacking in front of the television), and tend to think alike when it comes to weight issues (like urging children to eat a lot at dinner so they can grow “big and strong”). Hispanic families may be at a particular risk due to their diets, which traditionally are high in carbohydrates and may contribute to weight gain.

As lives become busier, there is less time to cook healthful meals, so it has become easier to eat at restaurants, grab takeout food or buy quick foods at the grocery store to heat up at home. All of these can contain much more fat and calories than meals prepared from fresh foods at home.

SOURCE: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/keystrategies/pdf/make-a-difference.pdf>

Summit *Continued from page 1*

that include Hispanic state elected officials, Cabinet officials, corporate executives and representatives from other national organizations. Summit speakers have included U.S. Treasury Secretary Anna Cabral, Florida House Speaker Marco Rubio and Congressman Luis Guterierrez (IL), among others. The newest component of the NHCSL Summit is the John S. Martinez Golf Outing created to help raise funds for the John S. Martinez Excellence in Leadership Scholarship Fund. NHCSL is making the golf outing a tradition to help advance the educational and professional development of our future Latino leaders in public service.

The 5th National Summit is cause for celebration as it marks a track record of proven success and progress. This year’s Summit will be an invaluable opportunity for NHCSL’s state legislators as we confront some of the hard-hitting policy issues taking shape for the upcoming Presidential elections

Education *Continued from page 2*

Hispanic high school students from their district have the opportunity to compete for the scholarships and internship. Students will be placed in the office of their Hispanic state legislator for a two month internship this summer.

“We know that education is key to any individual’s success and we are delighted to be a part of this initiative,” said David L. Cohen, executive vice president for Comcast and chairman of the Comcast Foundation.



save the date!

2007

NHCSL
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators

Fifth National Summit

November 15-18

Miami, Florida



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The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) is the preeminent organization representing the interests of 300 Hispanic state legislators from all states, commonwealths, and territories of the United States. Founded in 1989 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)3, NHCSL is a catalyst and advocate for joint action on issues of common concern, such as health, education, immigration, homeownership and economic development to all segments of the Hispanic community. NHCSL also works to design and implement policies and pro-

cedures that will impact the quality of life for Hispanic communities; serves as a forum for information exchange and member networking; an institute for leadership training; a liaison with sister U.S. Hispanic organizations; a promoter of public/private partnerships with business and labor; and a partner with Hispanic state and provincial legislators and their associations representing Central and South America.



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