

# STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2010

## From the President



Greetings and welcome to the first issue of Strengthening Our Voices for 2010! The year began with snowstorms across many parts of the country – Washington, D.C. was even frozen for weeks. Many of our communities also continue to weather the tough economy as they struggle to survive a deep recession. Families are stretching budgets, and our states are working to balance our budgets and find new ways to spur the economy to grow our competitiveness for the future. And so, competitiveness is at the core of our goals for our states and the Latino community.

NHCSL President, Sen. Iris Y. Martinez (IL) NHCSL members, our constituents, and our states are central to the renewal and preservation of American competitiveness and a strong, growing economy. Our leadership is key to revving up the economy. Our nation's competitiveness relies on people living and working in an environment in which government helps people to live healthy, educated and empowered lives.

America cannot be competitive if we aren't healthy. Congress recently passed a health reform bill that may provide new protections for people with pre-existing conditions, and provide new opportunities to buy insurance with government support for families who may not have been able to afford it. The bill also will allow workers to take their health insurance with them when leaving a job – something that will be very important to Latino entrepreneurs, who still lead the country in starting small businesses.

To be healthy, we must also pay attention to fitness and prevention. We work every year to address health disparities, including obesity, cancer, depression and high blood pressure, through legislation. We must redouble our efforts to get our communities to eat and live healthy, active lives.

Our legislative summit on Hispanic obesity, in Washington, brought 50 of us together to find policy solutions to the crisis of Hispanic obesity. We are working with national experts in nutrition, public health, medicine and fitness to identify real solutions to the problem. Read more about the summit on our website. It is my hope that we all work together to reduce the alarming trend of Hispanic obesity so that our communities can be competitive.

Competitiveness will also mean looking at new generators of economic growth – including the roles of clean energy and broadband adoption in growing jobs in our states. We also will be looking at the role we can play in reinventing our schools to prepare our children to be competitive in America and the world.

NHCSL members are key to Latino and American competitiveness in the 21st Century. Let us once again recommit our work to realizing a competitive and progressing America.

Suerte con todos sus esfuerzos este año.

Saludos,

Senator Iris Y. Martinez (IL)  
President

## NHCSL CALLS ON CONGRESS TO SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

In renewed efforts to bring immigration reform to the forefront of issues facing the nation's leadership, rallies were held in over 70 cities around the country on May 1st. Debate over immigration policies had intensified in recent days, spurred by controversial new legislation introduced in Arizona. The Los Angeles May Day rally was the largest, with over 60,000 participants.

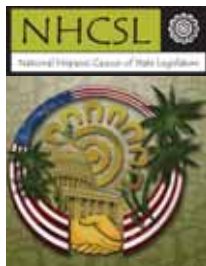
Although there were no reports of violence, Illinois Congressman Luis Gutierrez, Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez (MD), and 33 other activists were arrested in Washington, D.C. during a sit-in outside the White House. In an appearance on the CBS program *Face the Nation*, Rep. Gutierrez said he was arrested because he believed it was the time to "escalate and to elevate" awareness of immigration issues on behalf of those who are unable to enter the United States due to what he believes is a broken system.



Over 200,000 marched for comprehensive immigration reform in the nation's capital on March 21st.

With Governor Brewer's unfortunate signing of SB 1070 into law came many protests from both residents of Arizona and activists across the country. After the law's passage provoked fear throughout local communities, the first set of lawsuits was filed against the state the morning of April 29th. These were aimed at protecting Arizona's residents and visitors from being racially profiled and stripped of constitutional rights.

*Continued on page 2* See [NHCSL Calls on Congress](#)



**Eighth National Summit of Hispanic State Legislators**

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### IN THIS ISSUE

- Comprehensive Immigration Reform
- NHCSL Leadership Visits with Congressional Leaders
- Protecting the Financial Interests of our Consumers
- STEM Targeted Fields Scholarship Program

## Protecting the Financial Interests of our Consumers

A resolution addressing the nation's financial crisis was recently approved by the Rhode Island Senate. The resolution urges Congress to work together to restore confidence in the financial services industry and assure that new safeguards will be implemented to prevent devastating problems from reoccurring. Rhode Island senators Pichardo, Sheehan, DiPalma and Pinga introduced the measure while Congress was considering legislation that would create a new consumer protection agency under the Federal Reserve. According to Sen. Pichardo, the problem with the existing bill is that the Treasury Department would have the power to veto new consumer protection rules. He maintains that this has the effect of undermining the ability of the new agency to protect consumers.

Sen. Pichardo and the other Rhode Island legislators were compelled to act because they saw the need to protect consumers from abuses by large banks, while their legislative power only allowed them to regulate institutions within the state. With resolve to bring about action following what he characterizes as "the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression," Senator Pichardo chose to hand-deliver the resolution directly to members of Congress on April 15. It was presented to U.S. Senators Reed and Whitehouse at a meeting with the U.S. Senate Democratic Hispanic Task Force, which focused on economic issues facing communities.


Protecting consumers will help revitalize our economy, allowing them to once again earn trust and support from financial institutions, which are critical to economic growth. Financial institutions must work with consumers to find solutions to Main Street's problems of foreclosure and limited access to capital. At the 2nd Housing Symposium, made possible by support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, NHCSL members learned about exceptional work being done to reduce foreclosures. Efforts such as those of Philadelphia's Judge Annette M. Rizzo, who works toward mitigating foreclosures in her district, should serve as a model for other states. Judge Rizzo's program brings homeowners and lenders together for mediation sessions that attempt to avoid foreclosure. Although the President's foreclosure prevention program has been beneficial to many, entrepreneurs and those who lost their jobs have been disqualified from participating. It is important not to forget about distressed families that are hoping to regain stability in their homes. 

See NHCSL Calls on Congress Continued from page 1

Representative Ben Miranda (AZ) assisted the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders in filing one of the lawsuits, stating that "it was necessary to follow suit quickly to calm the community's fears" and ensure that the law did not take effect. He added that the signing of SB 1070 had already led to people "packing up and fleeing," and that it will take time to determine the law's economic effects on Arizona. In absence of federal action on immigration reform, other states that may follow Arizona's lead are Texas, Utah, Georgia, Ohio and Maryland.

Hispanics, documented and undocumented alike, continue to be major contributors in the U.S. economy. The group's purchasing power has grown enormously in recent years: according to a report by Mintel International Group, there was a staggering 349% increase in Hispanic per capita disposable income from 1990 to 2008. The population is a very young one with an increasing number of entrepreneurs that are expected to extend this growth.



Throughout the economic downturn, the undocumented have shown a strong will to survive and provide for themselves, despite the hardships suffered by many. Facing job loss and limited resources, some have chosen to return to their countries, while others remain in the United States in hopes that its economy will be revitalized. These immigrants hope to continue providing for their families so that they can be effective members of the nation they have made their homes. 

Participants at the immigration march in Washington, D.C.

## STEM Targeted Fields Scholarship Program

NHCSL is proud to work together with the Verizon Foundation to promote completion of undergraduate studies in targeted STEM fields. Scholarships will be issued to Hispanic students who lack financial capacity, yet are academically equipped to succeed through college.

NHCSL will award scholarships to Hispanic college students in six states: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas. Guidance and financial support will be provided to the recipients of the program. Each recipient will be awarded a one-time \$2,500.00 grant for educational purposes, as well as an internship with Verizon. Online applications are available at [www.nhcsl.org](http://www.nhcsl.org).

The deadline to apply is May 15, 2010.





(L-R) Rep. Maria Candelari (IN), Rep. Minnie Gonzalez (CT), Sen. Iris Y. Martinez (IL), Congressman Luis Gutierrez (IL), Rep. Pedro Marin (LA), Sen. Juan Pichardo (RI), Rhina Villatoro, Elizabeth Burgos

## NHCSL'S LEADERSHIP VISIT WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS

Recently, NHCSL's leadership met with influential members of Congress to address issues of concern such as foreclosures, increases in immigration raids, lack of access to capital, and the importance of broadband expansion and access.

While meeting with Congressman Joe Baca (CA), members expressed frustration in their attempts to mitigate foreclosures through work with homeowners and their mortgage companies. The main concern was that banks are not following through with the mitigation process under the Making Home Affordable program. Congressman Baca urged members to put pressure on banks at the local level to ensure that they move towards mitigation that will further avoid foreclosures. In addition, the members expressed that pressure should be added to have banks release funds to entrepreneurs who are struggling to keep their businesses afloat.

NHCSL leadership also touched on the problematic lack of Census participation within the Hispanic community. Congressman Baca asked that members promote the Census in their states by doing more public service announcements until the August deadline for mailing back Census forms.

In meetings with Congressman Luis Gutierrez (IL) and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan (NM), members stated that it is important to include other faces – such as the Irish, Asian, and African populations - in the talks about immigration reform. This would convey the fact that many groups are impacted by immigration laws, while the effect on Latinos has become all-too-familiar. The members also participated in a press conference alongside U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (NJ) to inform the public of concerns Hispanics currently face with issues such as the enforcement of 287(g) in Arizona and Georgia.



NHCSL leadership meets with Congressman Joe Baca (CA)



NHCSL members participate in press Conference at the U.S. Senate Democratic Hispanic Task Force



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The NHCSL is the premier national association of Hispanic state legislators working to design and implement policies and procedures that will improve the quality of life for Hispanics throughout the country. NHCSL was founded in 1989 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)3 with the mission to be the most effective voice for the more than 300 Hispanic legislators. For more information visit [www.nhcsl.org](http://www.nhcsl.org).



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