

Compromiso Demócrata con el Pueblo Latino

A New Direction for Latino Families

Democrats are committed to advancing a legislative agenda that ensures that Latinos realize the American dream of security, health, economic empowerment and dignity. Democrats will work to ensure that Latinos are not only included but are at the table on every issue critical to our nation.

The Latino population in the U.S. mainland currently totals 42.7 million, or approximately 14 percent of the nation's total population. In addition, there are approximately 3.9 million U.S. citizens who reside in Puerto Rico. Just as notably, Latinos constitute the fastest growing minority population in the U.S. It is projected that by 2050, the Hispanic population will grow to 102.6 million or 24 percent of the nation's total population. Democrats recognize that Latinos can and should play a larger role in this nation's political affairs.

Recognizing the needs of Latino families, Democrats will take our country in a new direction by:

- * Promoting Economic Empowerment for Latino Families.
- * Securing Quality Education for Latino Students.
- * Increasing Access to Affordable Health Care
- * Ensuring a Secure and Dignified Retirement for our Seniors.
- * Enacting Realistic and Comprehensive Immigration Reform.
- * Protecting our National Security.

Promote Economic Empowerment

Latinos comprise about 13 percent of the work force and fuel our economy through their labor, spending, and entrepreneurship, yet their contributions have not been met with adequate employment opportunities or increased earnings. According to Census data, in 2005 the poverty rate amongst Hispanics was at 21.8% and the typical Latino family income dropped by \$1,631 since President Bush took office. A Pew Hispanic Center Report shows that Latinos are the only major group of workers whose wages have declined in recent years. It is time for a new direction.

A Census report shows that there were 1.6 million Hispanic-owned businesses in 2002 and the rate of growth among these businesses between 1997 and 2002 is triple the national average for all businesses. In fact, \$222 billion in revenue was generated by Hispanic-owned businesses in 2002. Democrats recognize the entrepreneurial energy of the Latino community and support minority small business initiatives that foster economic success. Democrats will also continue to fight for an increase in the minimum wage, which disproportionately affects the economic well-being of many Latinos.

Democrats are committed to Latino economic empowerment through our support of linguistically – and culturally – appropriate programs that provide educational, financial, and technical training for Latinos. Democrats support equitable employment policies that give Latinos an equal opportunity to compete for good jobs in the public and private sectors.

Republicans say that the economy is strong even as millions of Latino families are living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to make ends meet, and going deeper in debt. Bush Republicans are out of touch and have no economic plan for Latino families. Congressional Republicans have blocked Democratic efforts to raise the minimum wage while voting to approve a raise for Members of Congress. The centerpiece of their economic plan is a tax relief package that amounts to a handout to the nation's wealthiest people. They have stood by while families are burdened with staggering transportation costs due to skyrocketing gas prices. Corporate profits are at record levels while wages fail to keep up. It is time for a change.

Secure Educational Equity and Excellence

Nearly one in five K-12 public schoolchildren nationwide is Latino. Though these children are our nation's future workforce, tax base and leadership, many are concentrated in public schools with inadequate resources, leading to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates. The promise of a sound public education has fallen short for many Latino students and families. It is time for a new direction.

Democrats support educational equity and high expectations for all students, and we will continue to fight so that every student may benefit from quality educational programs. Democrats believe that we must invest in children at all phases of learning by supporting early childhood education programs, K-12 programs that target and serve Latino students, particularly English language learners and migrant students, and postsecondary programs and initiatives that ensure that all students may receive the benefit of a higher education. Democrats want the DREAM Act to become a reality, make college tuition deductible from taxes permanently, cut student loan interest rates and expand Pell Grants.

Democrats understand that increasing the level of educational attainment across the Latino community is essential to maintain our global competitiveness. Democrats will reverse the trends of low graduation and low college readiness by investing in dropout prevention, college preparation and outreach programs such as GEAR UP and TRIO. Democrats will strengthen Hispanic-Serving Institutions and community-based organizations by expanding the federal investment in these key centers of learning that open the doors to higher education for half the nation's Latino college students. Democrats will create pipelines for Latinos at the advanced degree level by establishing a graduate program for Hispanic-Serving Institutions which will strengthen critical areas such as teaching, health care, research and economic development.

Congressional Republicans consistently threaten Latino educational outcomes by under-funding and undermining education programs that address severe inequities in our public schools. Republicans have cut or frozen funding for successful programs that prepare many Latino students for work or college. Republicans have even under-funded the No Child Left Behind Act, the cornerstone of a Republican education agenda that – because it is severely under-funded - has failed in its promise to Latino students and families. It is time for a change.

Increase Health Care Access and Affordability

Nearly one out of every three (32.7 percent) Latinos do not have health insurance. This is the highest medical uninsurance rate of any major ethnic group in the nation, and the situation for Latinos is getting worse: from 2004 to 2005, the number of uninsured Latinos rose from 13.5 million to 14.1 million, according to Census data. Many Latinos endure cultural, linguistic, immigration-related, and economic barriers to health care that, combined with Republican cuts to Medicaid funding, have created a Latino health care crisis. For Latinos currently facing soaring health care costs, significant health disparities, and record rates of uninsurance, it is time for a new direction.

Democrats support closing the health care gap that confronts many Latinos. Democrats will continue to fight for expanding health care access and reducing health disparities, increasing culturally – and linguistically – competent health information, raising the numbers of Latino health professionals at all levels, eliminating legal immigrant eligibility bars that prevent access to health care, protecting food security, providing equitable health care to residents of Puerto Rico and ensuring that every child has an opportunity for a healthy future.

Family health insurance costs have risen 70 percent since 2000, yet Republicans have heartlessly slashed Medicaid funding and health programs that help Latino families stay healthy. In addition, Republicans have used anti-immigrant measures to push for health policies that hurt Latino citizens and particularly impact Latino children. It is time for a change.

Ensure a Secure and Dignified Retirement

According to a National Council of La Raza report on Hispanic Retirement, by 2010 Hispanic seniors are expected to account for 7.2 percent of the older U.S. population, a figure that will rise to 11.2 percent by 2030 and 17.5 percent by 2050. However, older Latinos are less likely to have income from employer-provided and other private pensions and assets, and 76 percent of all Hispanics over the age of 65 rely on Social Security for 50 percent or more of their total income. The Republican leadership has attempted to cut and privatize Social Security, the end result of which would be a dramatic reduction in benefits for Latinos putting them at risk to fall into poverty. It is time for a new direction.

Democrats have fought against plans to privatize Social Security and believe we need to enact real pension reform to protect workers' financial security. Democrats intend to expand personal savings incentives and make sure that Latinos have a secure and comfortable retirement.

Republicans have promoted substantial privatization of Social Security and benefit cuts for millions of retirees while protecting special interests. It is time for a change.

Enact Realistic and Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Our immigration system is broken. Our borders are not effectively enforced and immigrants are more likely to die in the desert. Families are separated for decades waiting for their immigration applications to be processed. There has been no progress in addressing the 12 million undocumented immigrants. It is time for a new direction.

Democrats support bipartisan and workable comprehensive immigration reform that provides a path to legalization for hard-working immigrants, a temporary worker program that protects the rights of all workers, reunites families, strengthens our economy, and honors the values of the United States of America as a nation of immigrants. We should be focusing our resources on our national security and capturing terrorists and criminals. We believe we can solve our immigration crisis by combining tougher and more effective enforcement of our immigration laws with fair and realistic reforms. In addition, to help protect the best interests of our citizen children, we support giving immigration judges the ability to protect them.

House Republicans passed an anti-immigrant bill, endorsed by the Bush Administration, which will do little to secure our borders. In response, the Senate passed a tough but comprehensive immigration reform package. Rather than negotiate with the Senate to craft a comprehensive immigration reform bill, House Republicans have spent several weeks using hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on divisive sham hearings and have failed to send an immigration reform bill to the President's desk. It is time for a change.

Protect our National Security

Latinos have a proud history of serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, with 1.1 million Hispanic veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. Today, many Latinos are deployed and serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, and around the world. Thousands of Latinos have lost their lives demonstrating their patriotism defending our nation. Republican mismanagement of our national military and strategic policies has placed soldiers at greater risk than necessary and has damaged our national security.

Democrats believe we must proclaim leadership with a tough and smart plan to transform failed policies in Iraq, the Middle East, and around the world. We need to require Iraqis

to take responsibility for their country and begin the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2006. And we must honor our commitments to our veterans by strengthening their safety net, securing a sound veterans health system, and empowering their future.

Hispanic veterans and military retirees risked their lives to defend our country and deserve to receive promised benefits. Democrats are dedicated to honoring the loyalty and contributions of all Hispanic veterans and military retirees, from those who served in WWII and Korea to those now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Democrats will work to create new opportunities for and address the needs of Hispanic veterans and military retirees.

Democrats believe that continued economic development and democracy in Latin America is of vital interest to the United States' national security. Democrats are committed to working to reestablish our nation's partnership with Latin America's people and leaders, and will continue to support robust U.S. leadership for economic development, democracy, and security throughout the hemisphere.

Republicans have failed to capture Osama Bin Laden or destroy Al Qaeda. They have led us into a misguided war in Iraq on manipulated intelligence. Republicans have no realistic plan to win the peace, have failed to provide a strategy to stabilize Iraq or begin responsible redeployment of our troops. They have strained the U.S. military and cut veterans' health care.

Democrats will protect our homeland with strong and smart policies that will provide real security and uphold our values as a nation. It is time for a change.