



**A Civic Engagement Update
for the Pennsylvania Latino Community**

A CONGRESO Bi-Monthly Publication

February 8, 2007



February 8, 2007

Dear Fellow Pennsylvanians:

Join us, as we explore the issues most important to our communities. This edition of the Congreso Civic Engagement Update focuses on the important discussion of immigration and how the national debate has affected Latinos in the last year and will continue to do so without effective, federal legislation. The time for action has come, because we recognize the importance of passing legislation before the presidential election campaigns take the thunder from such pressing issues.

Congreso begins largely its advocacy this year on immigration with this update, imploring all Latinos to become involved and influence federal legislators. One of our best opportunities to unite the voices of Latinos across the nation is through the National Council of La Raza's National Advocacy Day March 7 & 8. Registration ends February 28, so if your organization is interested in lobbying alongside all of us on Capitol Hill, contact NCLR at www.nclr.org. The more voices we bring to the table, the more powerful our message.

On a local level, we are excited to support the voices of the Latino community by providing venues through which our opinions are expressed and heard. We are hosting a 2007 Election Event with the community, as a way to take our voices to the candidates and to be more effective in casting our votes this election year. In addition, on April 5th, we and The Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce are hosting a Mayoral candidate forum in which we already have commitments from most candidates. Again, please join us!

Our next Civic Engagement update will focus on the following four core areas we are taking to the legislators on National Advocacy Day: the need to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act, to provide more education and training opportunities for Latinos entering and climbing the ladder in the workforce; the need to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, to promote alternatives to incarceration for our youth; the need for increased domestic violence funding, for the programs that serve those Latinos that are gripped by violence; and the DREAM Act, the need to support our youth in higher education.

We look forward to working alongside you in all of these endeavors.

Gracias,

Nicholas Torres
President, Congreso de Latinos Unidos



Civic Engagement Update

February 8, 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 blue titles to link directly)

[Immigration and Its Effects on Pennsylvanians](#)

[Newsworthy](#)

Immigration

Education

Economic Self-Sufficiency

Safety & Violence

Electoral Participation

Health

Housing/Energy

Federal and State Budgets

[Important Dates](#)

[Important Links](#)

Highlight: Immigration & Its Effects on Pennsylvanians

Background

Immigration has been in the shadows of the vast change seen in the House and Senate leadership in the federal government. But it is receiving attention. President Bush highlighted the need for comprehensive reform in his State of the Union address on January 23rd. The highlights of his “fair and secure” immigration reform included security along the southern border and a temporary worker program, to take the pressure off the border. He hopes Congress will be successful in putting forward bills in the House and Senate, important since he is hoping that federal immigration reform will boost the success rate of his domestic policy before the end of his presidency.

Last year immigration reform was focused on House bill HR4437 and Senate bill S2611. The House bill was very punitive, even penalizing community-based organizations for serving undocumented residents. The Senate bill was much more comprehensive, but didn’t gain the traction it needed to pass in the House. So we’re back to square one, legislatively, on federal, state and even local levels in some towns across Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Status

Pennsylvania has an aging and slow-growing population and a workforce that cannot sustain growth. Immigrants have countered the steady population loss Pennsylvania has witnessed over the last 50 years. There is a current worker gap, as there is not enough unskilled labor in the state to meet the economy’s current demands. This point was eloquently made in the US Senate public hearing in Philadelphia on July 5-2006, by representatives from multiple industries: agriculture, hotel & tourism, and landscaping. Immigrants, whether documented or not, provide much needed labor that sustains our economy. 90% of new job growth from 1996-2000 in Pennsylvania was due to immigrants.¹ Philadelphia is one of two of the 10 largest metro areas to lose population in the 90s. This out-migration has not been equally countered by foreign-born populations, which generally maintain balance and rejuvenate large cities, as has happened in New York and Boston.

Need for Federal Reform

Although immigration was not included in the first 100 hours of the new House agenda, there is **a new immigration bill being drafted by Senators and House Representatives from both sides of the aisle.** Kennedy & McCain are still the chief architects. Rep Jeff Flake, (R-AZ) Arizona, and Luis V. Gutierrez, (D-IL) are chief writers on the House side. Kennedy is even more strategically positioned than last year, as he is the incoming chairman of the Senate Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship Subcommittee. Sensenbrenner, who crafted HR4437, has been taken off of the major Congressional committees. He was the chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

If the new piece of legislation mirrors that of S2611, we can possibly expect²:

- DREAM included: Undocumented immigrant students would be put on a path to citizenship and would be able to continue on to college along with their classmates.
- Significant increase in family visas: The family-based immigration system would 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 would be more than doubled to more realistically allow immigrants to come legally in the future to work.

¹ Pennsylvania Immigration & Citizenship Coalition Fact Sheet, 2006

² Congreso Civic Engagement Update, June 20, 2006

- A new temporary worker program: S2611 provided 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 included worker protections, gave workers the ability to change employers, and provided a path to permanent residence for those who want to stay.
- Language hurdle to legalization: Undocumented immigrants who are legalizing would have to meet the same requirements for English and Civics knowledge as someone who is applying for citizenship.
- Punishment out of proportion to crime: the bill contained 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.
- Reduced access to justice: A number of provisions in the S2611 reduced the ability of immigrants to have their day in court when subject to a bad government decision including arbitrary or indefinite detention.

These lawmakers are planning to revisit the requirement listed in S2611, which would have required those living in the US for less than two years to go back to their countries and then apply. They are considering this, noting the difficulty that it would present both logistically and in terms of enforcement. Unlike much of the rhetoric heard about amnesty, to be granted citizenship, undocumented residents would have to remain employed, pass background checks, pay fines and back taxes, and enroll in English classes.

Other legislation is being introduced as well. For example, Senator Isakson (R-GA) is developing a bill that would require the U.S. border to be declared secure before any legal status could be given to undocumented immigrants.

On January 10, 2007, House Representatives and Senators **reintroduced “AgJobs” legislation**. AgJobs would give many agricultural workers in this country who lack authorized immigration status the chance to become legal immigrants, ensuring a stable labor supply for agricultural employers. Quite timely, as the extreme necessity for seasonal workers in Pennsylvania was recently highlighted at the PA Farm Show in January. The current guest worker program is cumbersome and does not facilitate the level of hiring needed to keep crops from reaching supermarket shelves. One out of every seven jobs is tied to agriculture, and PA’s agriculture industry inextricably relies on immigrant labor.³ This legislation could affect up to 1.5 million agricultural workers. For more information on the AgJOBS, visit the Farmworker Justice website: http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/AGdocs/FJAgJobsSummaryLg1-2007.pdf

The current guest worker program, known as H2A - for a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act - has been around for more than 60 years and has become outdated, enrollment is complicated, and it is for seasonal workers only. PA has more than 58,000 farms, and only 38 growers are using the program. The nation's largest producer of specialty mushrooms, in Kennett Square, PA, has tried to use the current program five years ago and was told that the U.S. Department of Agriculture doesn't consider mushroom production seasonal. This vital industry is in dire need of workers, and with practically full employment in the area, they need new workers – immigrant workers.

The Secure Fence Act was the only significant piece of immigration legislation to pass last year. Many skeptics of the bill claim that the government will unlikely prioritize funding to build the 700 feet wall. The political will doesn’t exist, and to many it seems to be a non-solution with a high price tag. Within President Bush’s Homeland Security Budget for 2008, though, his stated priorities include \$1.8 billion for the "virtual fence" at the border, 3,000 new Border Patrol agents and 600 new detention beds; an additional \$80 million more for nuclear detection; and \$224 million to hire airport security checkers.⁴

In December a number of Immigration Raids were conducted around the country. NCLR, MALDEF, LULAC, and NALEO sent a letter to President Bush regarding recent raids. A clip of letter sent to the President stated, “We write to express our deepest concern and alarm over the recent raids by Immigration

³ Philadelphia Inquirer, January 12, 2007

⁴ Washington Post, February 6, 2007

and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials at Swift & Company plants. It has been reported that more than 1,200 individuals have been taken into ICE custody and detained at facilities throughout the country, and some have been removed from the U.S. These raids have separated families, closed factories, and slowed the economies of entire regions. Yet the raids have not significantly reduced the size of the undocumented immigrant population, and have not rooted out unscrupulous employers who hire and exploit immigrant workers. Surely this is not a convincing way to resolve our country's real immigration problems.”

Local Action

Over the last year, Pennsylvania has been labeled as the ‘anti-immigrant’ state. Pennsylvania is home to 32 negative ordinances in Pennsylvania cities (almost half of all anti-immigrant ordinances nationwide). The reason for this is somewhat of a mystery, though, as undocumented immigrants make up barely 1% of our state population.

On the other end of the spectrum, on January 23, 2007, the Lancaster City Council unanimously passed a **pro-immigrant resolution**. The resolution shows strong support for comprehensive reform and earned legalization. This ordinance will send a strong message, and as Hazelton started the slew of anti-ordinance across the state and country, our best hope is that Lancaster’s strong message of support will do the same.

The resolution urges Congress and President Bush to reject “all immigration reform efforts that criminalize individuals because of their immigration status, view immigration policy as a border-only security issue and fail to recognize our common humanity and the values of our nation.”

The resolution was sponsored by Councilman John Graupera and Councilman Jose Urdaneta. It endorses “earned legalization” for illegal immigrants now living, working and contributing to society and calls on Congress to consider that proposal as part of a comprehensive, bipartisan approach to immigration.

Hazelton has not been successful in implementing the provisions in its local ordinance. In fact, the city has had to alter its ordinance various times due to legal issues, and the city is scheduled to go to trial on March 12th against a lawsuit filed by PRLDEF, MALDEF and the ACLU. FAIR has supported Hazelton by helping them write and rewrite their ordinance, claiming that it will fight illegal immigration.

This ordinance and the one in Riverside, New Jersey, have proven that local communities are unable and even lack capacity to manage the provisions inherent within them. The logistical nightmares of enforcing employment and resident status on a local level are proving to be logistical nightmares.

More importantly, another result of the ordinance in Hazelton and Riverside is that many *documented* residents who are Latino have left the town, noting how the cities have become extremely unwelcoming to the Latino community. The ordinances have negatively affected all Latinos living in those towns. Latino businesses have suffered as well, which has negatively affected the towns and regressed the general economy back before the arrival of Latinos to these areas.

English-only has been one provision in some ordinances, such as that of Hazelton. English-only legislation is not a legal status issue; it is an issue that affects all immigrants and citizens whose dominant language is something other than English.

As many Latinos know, the demand for English classes is incredibly high. One of the strongest arguments against immigrants is that they don’t know English. Hispanic immigrants learn English at high rates, to the point that by the time the 3rd generation is in country, those speakers are English-dominant and are not proficient in Spanish.

By limiting all government forms and communications to English, we disenfranchise documented and undocumented residents and citizens. Doing so only puts a drain on city and state government, as the time and effort to handle the confusion and misunderstanding of residents increases the work that city and state government workers have to do.

All Latinos and all immigrants from other parts of the world recognize that English is the language of commerce, industry and power. Without providing opportunities to learn the language, we are actually suppressing their potential in the workforce and in society. Besides, English-only legislation is unenforceable, considering there are millions of Puerto Ricans who are US citizens, and their official language is Spanish.

¿Y Qué?

Latinos are the face of immigration, even though in some cities such as Philadelphia, Latinos are actually a minority immigrant group representing less than 25%⁵. Latinos are now the majority minority in 27 states. As such, even when looking at images in the media, it seems as though anti-immigrant individuals and groups have made the ‘illegal immigration’ issue a Latino issue.

This presents problems for numbers of reasons:

- a. You can’t judge someone’s legal status based on the color of someone’s skin.
- b. Most Latinos are in the country legally.
- c. Honing ‘illegal immigration’ as a Latino issue has led to racial profiling. Recent ‘illegal immigrants’ raids have led to the arrest of innocent Latinos. These ‘mis-arrests’ were based on supposition, largely because of the color of the victims’ skin.
- d. The results of the recent 2006 National Survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center shows that more than half of Latinos surveyed say they see an increase in discrimination as a result of this year’s policy debate. Latinos are feeling more discrimination in their everyday lives.

The exodus of resident and citizen Latinos from Hazelton, PA and Riverside, NJ have affected Latino businesses and even the businesses and economies of the towns in general. Many Latinos have been in the press, reporting recent challenges due to the negativity provoked by the ordinances. Some Latinos are not having their trash picked up by city services, a business owner had a rock thrown through his window the first week he was in business, and many businesses, which revitalized a fledgling community, have shut down because they’ve lost so many customers. The local ordinances have divided communities and brought out the worst in some of its residents.

For Latinos who came without papers, they did so in large part because of economic despair. The immigration debate has become a civil and human rights issue. One that touches all US residents, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Congreso’s Position

- The United States needs comprehensive immigration reform.
- A tiered-system for a path toward legalization and citizenship (like that proposed in S2611) is costly, cumbersome and extremely difficult to enforce. S2611 would have required all undocumented residents living in the United States for less than five years to leave the United States. This move would additionally hurt US businesses and tear apart families – two values Americans hold dear.
- Immigration reform will be much more successful if undocumented residents are given ways in which to legalize their status, without leaving the country.
- Our immigration system must also more effectively address the backlogs and complexities of bureaucracy for our legal immigrants. Many immigrants’ legal situations are tenuous and threatened because of the difficulty in gaining permanent legal status.
- Immigrants are good for the economy, so we need to develop a system that allows for that labor force.
- Families need to be together, when at all possible.
- Penalizing employers, tenants and immigrants themselves only detracts from the root problem – the immigration system.
- The immigration system is federally-based. We cannot create local and state strategies or proposed solutions, because they just create more problems for those communities and the ones surrounding them.

⁵ Immigration and Urban Revitalization in Philadelphia, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, Sept. 2004

Congreso's Action

- Congreso's President, Nicholas Torres, served on a panel of immigration experts on WHYY's Citizen's Forum in January. He was positioned to give the "pro-immigrant stance". Nick highlighted the need to give the divisive issue a human face, as it is the system that is broken, not low-income workers trying to support themselves and their families.
- Congreso will join other Latino organizations around the country for the National Council of La Raza's National Advocacy Day on March 8, 2007. We will meet with our Senate and House of Representative offices, to stress our views on the important elements of comprehensive reform and the need to prioritize federal legislation.
- Congreso signed onto NCLR's letter requesting that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reconsider an increase of the naturalization fees charged for processing naturalization and immigration applications. NCLR noted that "people should not be forced to pay a lot more money for poor customer service, lost files, and long backlogs." Fees for naturalization applications may increase as much as 100% or more, raising the fee from the current \$400 to \$600 or even \$1,000. This would prevent citizenship for many low-income immigrants who wish to become U.S. citizens but simply cannot afford to do so. We hope that USCIS and the Department of Homeland Security will be able to find another solution to the financial burden that USCIS feels on its operations. Fees have increased 450% since 1990.⁶ The Dominican American National Roundtable (DANR) issued a press release on February 2nd with important steps to follow, if you choose to advocate for Congressional funding of USCIS fees.
<http://www.danr.org/ip.asp?op=news>

⁶ National Immigration Forum Update, December 29, 2006

Immigration

See the brief above.

Education

1. The Drop-out Crisis is nationwide, and there's a forum through which to learn more on how to address it. As part of the Learning to Finish Campaign, the Pew Partnership for Civic Change recently created **a wiki website that concerned citizens and practitioners can use to contribute information regarding the dropout epidemic, possible solutions and case studies from schools and communities.** Users can create a free account in less than a minute to begin sharing what they know. See <http://www.learningtofinish.org> for details. Congreso re-testified alongside the School District of Philadelphia, PCCY, Philadelphia Youth Network and many others, on February 6, 2007 to City Council to highlight the challenges in Philadelphia and propose possible solutions to the crisis. Our response will have to involve many stakeholders, as the drop out rate is gripping more than just our youth. Especially important to our community, since **Latino males have the lowest on-time graduation rate of any group in Philadelphia: 29.3 percent to 38.2 percent**⁷.

2. Representatives Roebuck and Evans proposed a \$14 million legislative package to recruit and retain teachers in urban and rural districts. Many PA teachers are trained here, but many do not stay to teach in PA. This is especially true in urban and rural areas. The incentives would encourage teachers to stay and teach in districts that have the greatest need. Additionally, they hope to bring the "Call Me Mister" program from Clemson University, which is designed to foster development of more male minority teachers. Of the state's 4,517 teacher graduates, only 50 were Hispanic!⁸

1. Economic Self-Sufficiency

The **PA Minimum Wage increased to \$6.25/hour as of January 1, 2007.** Remember to adjust your budgets, encourage Latinos earning minimum wage to advocate for themselves to ensure an increase AND celebrate the first increase in nine years! The wage increases again July 1, 2007 to \$7.15.

On a federal level, the House voted to raise the **federal minimum wage** to \$7.25 an hour. 29 states and the District of Columbia already have minimum wages higher than the federal rate. The Senate has additionally passed a minimum wage bill, but there are important tax and immigration provisions. The Senate bill would give small businesses tax credits and would give a credit to businesses that hire poor, at-risk youth, among others, and would prohibit companies from hiring undocumented workers by levying a penalty that would keep these companies from getting federal contracts for up to 10 years. In both bills, the minimum wage would go from \$5.15 to \$5.85 within 60 days of the President's signature. A year after that, it would go to \$6.55, and then a year after that it would reach \$7.25.

2. A wonderful advocacy resource from Pathways PA, **Investing in Pennsylvania's Families: Economic Opportunity for All**, highlights ways in which state government and larger community can lift Pennsylvania's low-income populations into the middle class. <http://www.pathwayspa.org/pdf/InvestingPAFamily-FINAL.pdf> The statewide unemployment rate for Hispanics was 7.2% in 2005, according to their studies.

3. An interesting study by the Congressional Budget Office shows that **income inequality continued to widen** in 2004. The average *after-tax* income of the richest one percent of households rose from \$722,000 in 2003 to \$868,000 in 2004, an increase of almost 20 percent. This increase was the largest increase in 15 years. In contrast, the income of the middle fifth of the population rose 3.6%. The income of the bottom fifth barely rose by 1.4%, to \$14,700 (which is the family income level of many Congreso clients). An interesting advocacy point when advocating for issues such as economic opportunity and minimum wage.⁹

⁷ Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative & Project U-Turn, "Turning It Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis", 2006

⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, February 6, 2007

⁹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, www.cbpp.org, January 23, 2007

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 Phila. or the Reading partnerships, contact Kristin Shipler at shiplerk@congreso.net.

2. Looking to combat crime in your neighborhood? Look at this website to assist in generating ideas. See the **Philadelphia Youth Aid Panel** link, as they are seeking volunteers. We need to ensure Latino participation, so that our Latino youth are averted from getting into the system. <http://www.phillyneighborhoods.org/Crime-Phila/crime-phila.html>

Electoral Participation

1. The **Public Conversation Series 2007**, is a series of forums, sponsored by UPenn, that center on Urban Poverty & Prosperity: Building an Agenda for Philadelphia's Next Mayor. See <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/urban/events/public%20conversation%20series/publicconversation2007schedule.htm> for the next forum, on Tuesday, February 13, 3:00-4:30pm, which will explore **Public Safety, Poverty, and the Justice System**.

2. **The Republican party has a candidate for the Mayoral election – Al Taubenberger, the President of the Greater Northeast Phila. Chamber of Commerce. Philadelphia Mayor hopefuls for the 2007 election include declared candidates Rep. Dwight Evans, Michael Nutter, US Rep. Chaka Fattah, Rep. Brady and Tom Knox.** All of the Mayoral candidates will compete in the May 15, 2007 primary election.

3. **Puerto Rico was given limited voting rights in the US Congress**, on Jan. 24, 2007, through a rules change that was overturned in 1995. These special legislators will have voting rights on amendments to bills. This is really symbolic, though, because if the votes of these 'special legislators' (like Rep Holmes from Washington, DC) decide the outcome of an amendment, the House immediately votes again without the delegates' participation.¹⁰

Health

Bipartisan Congressional Representatives are reintroducing **federal legislation aimed at ensuring that health plans offer fair coverage for mental health and addiction care.** The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act expands the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 by requiring group health plans to offer benefits for mental health and addiction on the same terms as care for other diseases. The legislation closes the loopholes that allow plans to charge higher co-payments, co-insurance, deductibles, and maximum out-of-pocket limits and impose lower day and visit limits on mental health addiction care. The bill applies to group health plans of 50 or more people. A majority of respondents to a National Mental Health Association survey indicated that they would support equity legislation even if it meant a \$1 per month increase to their premiums. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that such legislation will increase health care costs by far less than that amount.¹¹

Housing/Energy

1. The People's Emergency Center recently completed a study entitled, **"Homeless Families in Philadelphia Need More Than Housing"**. It is the first known comprehensive survey of homeless families in Philadelphia. The analysis of data from agencies across the city shows that homeless families in transitional housing are overwhelmingly led by single mothers grappling with psychological traumas, histories of domestic violence and sexual abuse as children. More than half of mothers are high school dropouts; half are raising children under the age of five – and many in families of three or more children; and half have never lived independently before entering the homeless system. For more information, see <http://www.pec-cares.org/>.

2. Disabled and elderly individuals in Pennsylvania lose their independence due to the physical challenges presented in their home environments. Home modifications (adaptations to a residence that increases ease of use, safety, comfort, and security) can help them restore, and/or maintain their independence. See <http://homemods.jevs.org>, which is a **website** that contains a wealth of information, as well as a number of program and funding links that service providers, advocates, consumers, and care-givers will find extremely useful **regarding home modifications**.

¹⁰ Washington Post, January 25, 2007

¹¹ Press Release, Kennedy and Ramstad Embark on Nationwide Tour to Promote Mental Health Equity Bill, Jan 12, 2007

Federal and State Budgets

Interested in details on the **President's 2007 initiatives, including domestic priorities?** From his recent State of the Union address:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2007/initiatives/index.html>

With the US debt currently at \$8.6 trillion, **President Bush released his budget** this week. It reflects increases in spending for the war in Iraq, continued tax cuts, and slashes in domestic spending. Overall domestic spending would be held below the rate of inflation in fiscal year 2008, that begins Oct. 1. The budget includes many newsworthy points:

- Funding for Customs and Border Protection, would rise 36 percent, to \$8.8 billion, and a good portion of the increase would go toward adding agents to the southern border.
- He would boost funding for Pell Grants, a program supported by a bill passed by the House a couple of weeks ago.
- 44 discretionary education programs, including Even Start and some dropout prevention programs, would be eliminated.
- The Dept. of Labor's Job Training programs would be cut by more than \$1 billion.
- An 18 percent reduction in funds to provide heating assistance to 5.6 million low-income families is also included.¹²

For further analysis of the President's budget, go to:

<http://www.cbpp.org/2-5-07bud.htm>

The state of affairs on the federal level certainly affects our state's ability to fund programs for the benefit of Pennsylvanians.

Governor Rendell's proposed budget mirrors the squeeze from the federal level cuts for domestic spending. Overall, the budget for fiscal 2007-08, which begins in July, increases state spending to \$27.3 billion. That's up 3.5 percent from the last budget. The Governor is seeking creative funding strategies, by shifting taxes – cutting property taxes for most areas of Pennsylvania other than Philadelphia, raising the sales tax across the state, increasing cigarette tax and lowering the Philadelphia wage tax. The Governor's budget focuses on the priorities of healthcare coverage, and addressing serious transportation needs. Governor Rendell's healthcare plan would provide affordable health insurance for nearly 800,000 uninsured adults, and it would cost \$255 million in the first year.

In his one hour address, he also took the occasion to call for new gun-control laws. He has described the issue as a public health problem. The Governor wants the state to increase the penalty for possession of a stolen handgun to a felony, to pass bills requiring reporting of lost or stolen handguns, and to limit purchases of handguns to one a month.¹³

¹² Philadelphia Inquirer, February 5, 2007

¹³ Philadelphia Inquirer, February 7, 2007

Important Dates

- **February – April 2007: *Mayoral Forums***
 - **April 5, 5:30pm: Congreso and Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for the Latino community, focusing on community issues:** All Mayoral candidates have been invited to speak. Details coming soon.
 - **February 15, 6:30-8:30:** The Mayoral candidates share their thoughts on "**The Next Great City: Philadelphia**" report at the Academy of Natural Sciences- 19th and Ben Franklin Parkway. This report details 10 immediate, achievable and powerful recommendations to make important improvements to our neighborhoods, including open space, energy conservation, and neighborhood blight removal. - RSVP required.
 - **February 28:** Energy Coordinating Agency: **Mayoral Candidates Forum on Energy:** held at the Friend's Center, 15th & Cherry Sts. This is an opportunity to hear how the next Mayor will make Philadelphia a truly sustainable city in the context of the twin crises of global warming and oil depletion.
 - **March 6, 7pm:** The Philadelphia /Southern New Jersey Chapter of the **American Jewish Committee:** a Forum for Candidates for the Democratic Nomination for Mayor of the City of Philadelphia. The event will be held at the Union League in Lincoln Hall. All five of the Democratic candidates will be attending the forum.
 - **April 4, 6:30pm:** Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth: **Mayoral Candidates Forum on Children's Issues** at the Free Library of Philadelphia at 1901 Vine Street. Reserve your seat at www.pccy.org
- **February 10, 2007**

"The Future of Immigrant Rights" is a panel discussion as a part of the Gran Fiesta sponsored by the Latin American Law Students at UPenn. To enjoy the fiesta and listen to local immigration experts, email penn.lalsa@gmail.com for more information.
- **February 14, 2007, 3:30-6pm**

Torch of Hope comes to Philadelphia in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Join Day Without an Immigrant and Delaware Valley advocates to commemorate the February 14th march of last year and to move forward advocacy for promoting federal reform. The event is at Independence Park, 5th and Market Streets. Bring a candle and wear white!
- **February 22, 2007, 12:30-4:30pm**

An important workshop, entitled "**Obtaining Healthcare for Undocumented Immigrants: A training for Healthcare Providers**" at Nationalities Service Center, 1216 Arch Street, 4th Floor. The workshop will include: Emergency Medical Assistance; Medical Assistance; Other community resources; and Advocating for health services. For registration materials, email piccadmin@gmail.com Questions, contact Devi Ramkissoon at (215) 832-0626.
- **February 23, 2007 1-3pm**

The Coalition on Human Needs (www.chn.org) is holding **a forum on the 2008 proposed federal budget**. The forum is scheduled at the United Way of Southeastern PA, 7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia. The Coalition on Human Needs, led by Deborah Weinstein, is one of the leading alliances of national organizations working together to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable people. The region's new Congressional representatives – Senator Robert Casey and Congressmen Joe Sestak and Patrick Murphy have also been invited. To register, send an email to Gerri Griffin at ggriffin@uwsepa.org. Be sure to give your name, organization, and email address. Attendance is on a first-come-first served basis.

- **February 23 & 24, 2007**

Join Taller Puertorriqueño for the *11th Annual Arturo Schomburg Symposium entitled “Living Together: Challenging the Latino/African Diaspora’s Divide”*. On the 23rd, the symposium starts with a preview of recent works by Gina Echeverry, an advocate for Civil and Human Rights. Her art gathers the varied cultural expressions of the African Diaspora in Latin America, as well as the permanent struggle of women to reach their fulfillment in a society that denies their right to be. See http://www.tallerpr.org/cep_pages/cep_frameset.htm for more information.

- **March 1, 11-1pm**

Congreso is hosting a 2007 Election Kick-Off Event, where community members are invited to join and celebrate the election season and share opinions with the candidates. WHY? will be videotaping Latinos, to share their top priorities with the candidates, Rep. Cruz will discuss being a Latino legislator from North Philadelphia, the Board of Elections will have a voter booth demonstration, and the Committee of 70 will share information on voting rights, specific to the Latino community. JOIN US!

- **March & April 2007**

The *Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute* is seeking to develop the next generation of Hispanic Leaders, see <http://www.chci.org/> to apply for the nation’s most prestigious **Latino leadership programs**, expenses paid. There is still an opportunity to apply for a *Public Policy Fellowship by March 1, 2007 and Scholarship Awards by April 16, 2007*.

- **April 10, 2007 2-5pm**

The Urban Studies Program at Penn, in partnership with The Philadelphia Daily News, WHY?-FM and others, is hosting **an in-depth forum called “Urban Poverty and Prosperity: Building an Agenda for Philadelphia’s Next Mayor.”** Sponsors have invited someone from the administration of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to present that city’s poverty alleviation/wealth creation plan and its implementation. A panel and audience discussion will follow. For more information and directions call 215-898-7799.

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-Elect 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/>
- **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

