



Latino Issues Forum Poised To Shape Public Policy in Sacramento

After a month on the job Nora Vargas, the new Executive Director for the San Francisco based Latino Issues Forum (LIF), in collaboration with the California Latino Legislative Caucus, began her leadership post with a policy briefing affecting the large and fast growing Latino population in California.

“Nora’s legislative and advocacy experience will allow LIF not only to achieve its legislative goals but ensure the policy agenda for California reflects the needs of the growing Latino consumers,” stated Chairman of the Board Gaspar Laca. “We are now poised to make significant legislative advances on par with our increasing influence reflected in our demographics and representation of our elected officials,” said an LIF press release announcing Vargas’ appointment.

On October 18, 2007, LIF convened a policy briefing held at the State Capitol in Sacramento. Nora Vargas and Carrie Lopez, director of the Department of Consumer Affairs, gave welcoming remarks before handing the podium over to well-known demographer Dr. Leo F. Estrada from the UCLA School of Public Affairs.

Dr. Estrada gave compelling information on the growing Latino population and some of the implications for the country, State and Los Angeles basin. According to Dr. Estrada, Latinos comprise 44.5 million in the US (including Puerto Rico) and that would make America the second most populated Latino country in the world behind Mexico.

In California the Department of Finance reported last year



Above: Nora Vargas, Executive Director, Latino Issues Forum
Below: Dr. Leo F. Estrada, UCLA School of Public Affairs

Below: Carrie Lopez, Director of the Department of Consumer Affairs, an appointee of Governor Schwarzenegger.





that about 13 million Latinos reside in the State and comprise about 35% of the population.

The briefing focused identifying policies that would benefit Latinos in health, environment, sustaining California's future, technology access and consumer protection, and education. The room was filled with young professionals mostly staff to members of the legislature.

Interestingly, the forum did not delve into economic development issues and it is not part of the strategic policy development agenda being formed for 2008. However, the LIF has collaborated with Assemblymember Juan Arambula (D - Fresno) and has had regional workshops on economic implications such as Hispanic business issues and wealth building.

Dr. Ken Macias, the newly elected Chair of the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, has indicated plans to develop a research and development unit that focuses on economic development for the 450,000 plus Hispanic businesses across the State. He has set a priority to focus on advocating on behalf of Hispanic businesses in government and private sector procurement opportunities for his 68 chambers and their members.

Still yet, the LIF has influential leadership in place to have its policy initiatives seriously considered by the Legislature given the fact that Latinos have 28 seats of the 120 including the Assembly Speaker. However, except for Carrie Lopez, the Governor's key policy advisors for these public policy areas were not present at the forum.

Assemblymember Joe Coto (D-San Jose), who chairs the Latino Legislative Caucus, is a former education administrator and is passionate about doing the right things on behalf of the enormous population of Latinos. Coto is joined by the veteran policy maker and Latino advocate Senator Gil Cedillo (D-Los Angeles) who champions on behalf of immigrants, language access and economically underserved Latino populations who are least able to defend themselves.

Throughout the day LIF gathered subject matter experts to discuss some key issues affecting the Latino community



with an eye on proposing a legislative agenda they plan to introduce at a reception in January 2008 in Sacramento, the second year of the California legislative session.

The next Legislative session promises to be lively given the fact that it is a presidential election year, about one-third of the Assembly and Senate members will be termed out and new individuals elected, and, Governor Schwarzenegger will begin to twilight in his term in office with only two years left in his Administration.

In the meantime, the number of Latinos in California will grow, will be upwardly mobile in educational attainment, wealth building and will secure a larger portion of the California political pie as more Latinos and Latinas get elected to school boards, city councils, county supervisors, legislators, constitutional officers and congress. It is even possible that a Latino will be elected to Governor and US Senator within the next six years.

Today, Latinos make up over 47% of all children in public schools in California. The highest public policy priority for all Latino policy makers is how California will make sure that “No Child is Left Behind” given that in some districts the school drop out rate of Latinos hovers over 50%. And while this issue was not a focus point for the LIF forum, it weighs in heavily in determining the future economic well being of Latinos and more dramatically of all Californians.





The Latino Issues Forum has found a dynamic leader in Nora Vargas and she is a great compliment to the prestigious and influential board of directors that include individuals such as former Supreme Court Justice Cruz Reynosa and Frank Quevedo, vice president for Southern California Edison and Elmy Bermejo, who now serves as Deputy Secretary for External Affairs on behalf of Rosario Marin, Secretary for State and Consumers Services Agency.

We look forward to reporting on her future endeavors on behalf of Latino Issues Forum. For more information on Latino Issues Forum visit their website at www.lif.org - **LJ**

About **Latino Journal**

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