

STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2007

From the President



Dear Friends,

As you read this edition of the NHCSSL quarterly newsletter, I want you to pay special attention to a few articles that highlight some of our efforts in the past few months.

In particular I want to bring your attention to the success of our session, Health Disparities & Teens: How To Bring About Change, that was held in Puerto Rico last month. This session was specifically designed for state legislators to hear directly from our future generation – young teens, and the tough issues they face daily when it comes to their health.

The impressive group of teens on the panel gave their very candid and blunt perspectives on drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, depression, HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy. Thank you to Carla, Nick, Carolene, and Bianca for the reality check given to the legislators. Listen up everybody! We have a lot to learn from them.

In this issue I also want to introduce you to Representative Ken Esquibel from the State of Wyoming. Representative Esquibel was just elected to the House in November 2006 and you can learn more about his priority issues.

Finally, I want to remind you to “save the date” for the NHCSSL 5th National Summit in Miami, Florida, scheduled for November 15-18, 2007.

Thanks again for your continued support.

Assemblyman Felix W. Ortiz
NHCSSL President

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SESSION REVEALS TEEN HEALTH DISPARITIES

Did you know that the more time a child spends in front of a television the lower their I.Q. will drop? Or that the link between mental health and substance abuse is strong? These were just some of the interesting facts discussed at an NHCSSL session titled “Health Disparities and Teens: How to Bring about Change.” The session was held during the Council of State Governments’ (CSG) spring meeting in Fajardo, Puerto Rico and is a vital component to NHCSSL’s Healthy States Initiative.

Victor Medrano, Team Lead at the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health, moderated the session which included a panel of teens and health experts. Legislators, health experts and students exchanged information on health and social issues that concern teens. They talked about HIV/AIDS, mental illness, depression, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and teen pregnancy.

“The discussion offered legislators an opportunity to think about changes they can implement to help eliminated disparities in their own states and communities.” said Medrano.

The health experts panel included Dr. Jose Pons, Ph.D, a Clinical Psychologist and Program Director with the University of Ponce, School of Medicine; Dennis Romero, Acting Director for the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention at the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Lizbeth Rivera, Program Coordinator for the HIV/AIDS Prevention Program at ASPIRA-Puerto Rico; and Puerto Rico Senator Luz Arce Ferrer.

Dr. Pons talked of the effects that family has on a developing teen. “Family is critical for the social and emotional development of teens, and without a strong fam-

ily support system, adolescents will likely turn to negative activities, such as binge drinking,” he said.

Dennis Romero, SAMHSA Acting Director, who also focused his remarks on mental health among teens, said “80 million young adults under the age of 19 are growing up with mental health issues, and 20% will be diagnosed with a problem.”

Another devastating disease among teens is HIV/AIDS. Lizbeth Rivera encouraged state legislators to take action and become more informed about policies affecting HIV/AIDS and STD protection.



Teen participants

After hearing from the experts, the teen panel gave their perspectives.

Students participating in ASPIRA programs and from the Puerto Rico House and Senate Internship Program were on the teen panel. The speakers included 17-year-old Carolene Fontanet and, Bianca Gonzales, Carla Rodriguez, and Nick Pastrana, all 16 years old. Each gave their individual perspective on how poor choices such as smoking, drinking alcohol and engaging in unprotected sex can impact the lives of young people. The teens want adults to do more through “better educational outreach efforts” to deter young people from the pitfalls that put their health at risk. Sixteen-year-old Bianca said that “one of the biggest problems [among teens is] alcohol, but no one talks about the real effects of alcohol.”

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* Q&A: MEET THE LEGISLATOR WYOMING STATE REP. KEN ESQUIBEL

Following the November 2006 Wyoming state elections, Representative Ken Esquibel won a seat in the House of Representatives. Before taking office, he interned at the State House and Senate from 2001-2004. His recent victory doubled the number of Hispanic legislators throughout the entire legislature, the second being his brother Rep. Floyd Esquibel. The newly elected Democrat and railroad engineer represents Eastern Central Cheyenne, the 41st district.

Q: Since being elected in 2006, how have you focused political efforts to meet policy goals?

A: I have spent time in the areas of healthcare and tax structure. There are health disparities for Hispanics so I have been promoting programs to help them get checkups and screenings. To include more low-income Hispanics I have been pushing to raise the income requirements up to 250% of the Federal Poverty Line so that those who want HPV vaccinations can get it. I am also promoting, along with various other legislators, a new proposal to implement the Wyoming Wellness Day where people would make appointments and the government will pay for screening as well as time-off for those who work.

Q: Hispanics represent approximately 12–13% of Wyoming’s total population. To what extent are they politically involved?

A: Of the 90 members in the legislature there are only two Hispanics. Statewide, there are only two other elected officials in the city council. There is also a Latin American organization, Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE) where my sister, Ann Redman is the president. The HOPE Stars banquet annually raises funds through golf tournaments and gives achievement awards to Latino youth.

Q: What are you doing to increase Hispanic voter turnout.

A: I knock on every door to talk with my constituents and to share with them the disparity in the demographics. In my district, I increased voter turnout for Hispanics to 80%, which is greater than the 50% statewide.

Q: Could you share some details about the Wyoming Health Insurance pool policy (S.F. 0115) you co-sponsored?

A: This legislation was designed to increase the number of applicants for high-risk pools by 300-350 slots. The bill will allow individuals, who are high-risk to insurers to purchase insurance at a normal price. What needs to be worked on, now, is lowering the rates and working with companies; we need to encourage younger people to purchase insurance because more people means healthier citizens, lower rates, and increased access to health care professionals and providers. We also need to educate people on the benefits of being insured.

Q: What does it mean that Wyoming ranks high in the U.S. for coal production and what recommendations do you have for ensuring that the state’s landscape will be intact for future generations?

A: Wyoming has the overall lowest tax rate in the US. Federal mineral royalties and severance taxes from coal provide luxuries to the state. Analyzing title 39, the taxing statute in WY, some things are not being taken advantage of. During a period of economic bust in the 80’s, the severance tax was lowered from 10 to 7%. Since then, the economy has grown and revenues have increased by 40%. Revenues from the severance tax on coal will allow WY to invest in cleaner or renewable types of resources like coal gasification plants that are in the works. It is important to remember that these resources belong to the citizens of the state, not companies.

By Jose Saavedra, Intern

NHCSL, COMPUCREDIT HOST ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT SYMPOSIUM



David Hanna, CompuCredit CEO

In April, NHCSL members joined fellow lawmakers, policymakers, researchers and corporate leaders in Atlanta for an economic empowerment symposium – the first of its kind hosted by NHCSL and supported by CompuCredit Corporation.

The two-day symposium, “Bridging the Gap to Financial Empowerment for the Financially Underserved Hispanic Consumer” focused on the challenges and obstacles faced by the estimated 80 million people who

have credit scores below 660 and, by definition, are considered “sub-prime.” The event also presented financial empowerment strategies and potential regulatory changes that would affect the 54 million people that have “thin” or no credit files and the 22 million households that are currently unbanked.

Given that an estimated 51% of the unbanked and underbanked population in the United States is composed of Hispanics, African Americans, undocumented residents, and other minorities, NHCSL is working to educate, raise awareness, and elevate the debate on economic empowerment.

The symposium began with the presentation of “Crossing the Red-line”, a study conducted by the University of Denver’s Center for African-American Policy. The study reviewed the availability of financial services by zip codes and credit scores in several states and municipalities. The research indicated that while banks and other financial service providers have branches in traditionally Hispanic communities, those branches do not offer access to the full range of financial products and services.

Symposium attendees also reviewed the credit scoring process and its impact on everyday life. A credit score is a numerical expression based on a statistical analysis of a person’s credit history. The

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NHCSL HOSTS HISTORIC U.S. GATHERING : BEST PRACTICES FOR HEALTHY BORDERS

NHCSL, alongside its President, Assemblyman Felix W. Ortiz (NY), was a host to the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) for its XV Executive Committee Meeting. This meeting was held on June 22–24 in Los Angeles, California.

This was the first time COPA held a meeting in the Continental United States. Assemblyman Ortiz said that “This is a historic gathering for NHCSL and we are proud to be a host to the leaders from the Americas.” Ortiz is COPA’s Vice President of the North American Region.

Attending the meeting were NHCSL members Representative Joe Miro (DE), COPA Executive Committee Member of the Regional Parliaments and Inter-Parliamentary Organization; Senator Leticia Van de Putte, (TX) and COPA member of the Network of Women Parliamentarians; Assemblyman Hector de la Torre (CA), Senator Efrain Gonzalez, (NY), Representative Ben R. Miranda (AZ), and Speaker of the Assembly Fabian Nuñez (CA). Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and diplomats from 15 different member countries of COPA were also among the participants.



(left to right) NHCSL President Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (NY), Speaker of the Assembly Fabian Nuñez (CA), and Mexico Senator Carlos Jimenez, COPA President

The meeting was conducted in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The discussions focused on human trafficking, economic development, immigration and migration. Speaker Nuñez, who led a discussion on immigration, remarked that “the participation and impact of the Latino community on all levels of public policy is growing and is perhaps nowhere more vital than in the current debate in this country over immigration reform.”

COPA members also passed a resolution that asks the U.S. Congress to reach a conclusion on the issue of migration on the federal level, including the need to provide states with financial support for the implementation of migration policy. The resolution was officially adopted by COPA on June 23.

CompuCredit. *Continued from page 2*

number, typically falling between 300 and 850, is used by creditors to determine a person’s “creditworthiness” - the likelihood that a person will pay their debts. Lenders, such as banks, auto dealers and credit card companies, use credit scores to evaluate and mitigate the risk posed by lending money to consumers. Lenders also use credit scores to determine who qualifies for a loan, the interest rate charged for a loan, and a consumer’s credit limit.

On day two, Mr. David Hanna CEO, and Mr. Rich House, President of CompuCredit Corporation shared their vision of how the financial services industry should help bridge the gap to financial empowerment. They described how CompuCredit focuses on developing products and services that deliver an economic value proposition to the consumers throughout their financial life cycle.

Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (NY) and Representative Andres Ayala (CT), moderated a Q&A session where attendees discussed the need for a method and a vehicle to build and rebuild credit that is available to all consumers, regardless of their current credit score.

Based on the positive feedback from symposium participants, NHCSL announced that economic empowerment will continue to be a priority.

“Prevention and Promise for the Future” was the theme for the 2007 Alliance for a Healthy Border Conference in San Diego, California. Representatives from community health centers and organizations from the U.S. and Mexico border region participated with NHCSL legislators from Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, to discuss the health disparities and challenges in the border region.



(left to right): Rep. Dora Olivo (TX), Sen. Richard Miranda (TX), and Rep. Mary Helen Garcia (NM)

The conference, which was made possible by Pfizer, also featured national health experts including former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona, president of The Canyon Ranch Institute. The experts explained how their respective organizations work to improve the health conditions in the border communities by providing capacity building, eliminating disparities and conducting research.

NHCSL legislators led a panel discussion about the current policies that impact community health centers working in the border region. The panel included Senator Richard Miranda (AZ), Representative Mary Helen Garcia (NM) and Representative Dora Olivo (TX). They talked about ways in which community centers and border health organizations can work with state representatives. Garcia encouraged conference attendees to continue their work for the issues that are important to them, especially at the state level. Olivo mentioned that one of the best ways to educate a legislator about an issue is to testify and tell a story before a committee. “Personal stories can change our views,” she said. Miranda echoed the comments and told the audience to “lobby with passion for your mission and get involved.”

News...

NHCSL Releases *Children’s Health Survey Report & Findings*, which gives insight to the current attitudes and perspectives that Hispanic State Legislators have about children’s health. The report is available on the NHCSL website at www.nhcsl.org.



Health. *Continued from page 1*

After hearing the evidence represented by all the panelists, Senator Luz Arce closed the session by encouraging the legislators to listen to the teens, and most importantly to approach these health issues and take action appropriately. “We must be involved as legislators, parents and grandparents,” she said.

The Healthy States Initiative is a partnership of The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL), The Council of State Governments (CSG), and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL).

By Miguel Colom, Intern



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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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