



STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES

Legislando

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STATE LEGISLATORS TALK ENERGY, TRANSPORTATION AND CULTURE DURING VISIT TO SPAIN

By Allie Seibel, NHCSL Intern

Making and fostering connections between state legislatures and Spain was at the forefront of the agenda as members of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators traveled to Spain in May.

President Rep. Angela Romero (UT) and President-Elect Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) were joined by Rep. José Pérez Cordero (PR), Rep. Adam Zabner (IA), Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA) and Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk (MD) to form the NHCSL delegation for the trip.

Hosted in conjunction with *Fundación Consejo España-E.E.U.U.*, the Spain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Spain Embassy in the United States, the summit focused on international policy building and networking.

Our legislators began their trip in Madrid, visiting the Spanish Congress of Deputies and partaking in a welcome lunch hosted by Casa de América and Secretary of State for Foreign and Global Affairs, Diego Martínez Belío, and Josu Jon Imaz, Chairman of *Fundación Consejo España-EE.UU.*

"Getting to know each other is the best way to love each other, and we want to deepen the relationship between Spain and the United States, in the social, economic, business and cultural spheres," said Imaz.



Rep. Adam Zabner (IA), Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA), Rep. Angela Romero (UT), Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk (MD), Rep. Juan Candelaria (CT) and Rep. José Pérez Cordero (PR). Credit: Fundación Consejo España-E.E.U.U.

During the first day of policy sessions, focused on energy, our legislators met with the Spanish Wind Energy Association and **Iberdrola's Innovation and Training Center**, located in San Agustín de Guadalix, to focus on the importance of renewable energy in Spain, a country that derives nearly 57% of total energy generation from renewables.

"It was very interesting to me because energy is a very hot topic in our legislature back in Iowa this year," said Rep. Zabner (IA). "There's Spanish companies that export or that build wind turbines in the state of Iowa. The conversation about the challenges, the advantages is so similar to what's happening back in Iowa."

Transportation and infrastructure policy was the focus of the next day as Spain maintains the second-largest high-speed rail network in the world, with visits to the Ministry of Transport and Sustainable Mobility and the Association of Construction and Infrastructure Concession Companies, followed by a reception with the Secretary of State for Transportation and Sustainable Mobility José Antonio Santano Clavero.

"One of the things I campaigned on was trying to bring passenger rail to my community," said Rep. Zabner (IA). "And that's something that we struggle with in the U.S. and so that was really impactful, being able to get down to the nitty gritty of how permitting works in this country."

Legislators also traveled by high-speed AVE rail to Málaga and visited **Google's Cybersecurity Center**, followed by a session at the University of Málaga on the importance of the Spanish language globally.

"We're a global society," said Rep. Romero (UT). "So, how can we work better together, and how can we as states work with Spain and particularly the diplomats here in



NHCSL Legislators tour the Museo El Prado in Madrid, Spain. Credit: Consejo Fundación España-E.E.U.U.

providing renewable energy, using them as resources for high speed rail, and all of those policy pieces. But really [the important thing] is the connection, following your bloodlines and learning about your roots."

On the final day of the summit, focused on Spain's role in United States independence, legislators received a reception from Málaga mayor Paco de la Torre before traveling Macharaviaya, the birthplace of Bernardo de Gálvez, a legendary figure in the Revolutionary War for his role in denying the British forces access to American colonies from the south. Gálvez was declared an Honorary Citizen of the United States by a congressional law in 2014, and is one of only seven individuals in history to be granted honorary citizenship.

Legislators departed Spain with resources for their constituents and a reaffirmed commitment to the importance of United States-Spain relations on the state level.

"I would say that the thing that has been enhanced the most for me is how connected we really are," said Rep. Ortiz-Self (WA) of the trip. "We seem to think we're such different countries and continents, but in reality, our businesses are transatlantic. We are partnering in so many ways, in business, education, and infrastructure."

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear *Familia*,

As we enter the second half of this year, I would like to take a moment to reflect and thank you all for your continued hard work and dedication as state legislators to uplift your communities and constituents.

This year has been challenging for us, exacerbated by the chilling effect of the unprecedented acts of violence against Minnesota state lawmakers this past June, and I want to recognize the impact of this senseless violence in each of our state Capitols.

I'm always encouraging you to lean on each other for support, and I will keep doing so for the rest of my tenure because our Caucus is home to a resourceful, thoughtful and kind group of lawmakers, and we stand strong as a unified front to help our members and communities navigate any challenge that comes. In this spirit, it's crucial to insist on coming together to work towards policies that stride to make everyone's lives more affordable, safer and healthier.

And lastly, I'm excited to share that NHCSL's 23rd Annual Summit will take place on November 20th-23rd in Oklahoma City. I hope to see you all there!

Respectfully,

Rep. Angela Romero (UT)
NHCSL President



SPRING MEETING HIGHLIGHTS BIPARTISAN LATINO LEADERSHIP IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

NHCSL convened its 2025 Spring Executive Committee and BBA Meeting in Washington, D.C., bringing together Hispanic state legislators from across the U.S. to address national challenges through shared values and innovative policy solutions.

Amid a shifting political landscape under the 119th Congress and the new Administration, NHCSL members gathered in the Nation's capital to promote a more inclusive legislative agenda and reinforce the importance of Latino leadership at all levels of government.

A reception hosted by the Spanish Embassy at Ambassador Ángeles Moreno's residence underscored bipartisan unity. Congressional leaders including Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY), Rep. Carlos Gimenez (FL) and Rep. Pablo Hernandez (PR), joined NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT) in reaffirming support for Hispanic communities nationwide.

U.S. Senators Andy Kim (NJ) and Ben Ray Luján (NM) also addressed the Executive Committee, emphasizing intergovernmental cooperation to better serve Latino constituents.

Five dynamic policy sessions tackled key issues: immigration updates by the Migration Policy Institute; housing affordability and construction challenges with Pew and Leading Builders of America; broadband equity through the BEAD program with AT&T; cardiovascular health disparities with the National Health Council and the National Hispanic Medical Association; and online safety for teens, with speakers from Meta and influencer mom Ana Sol Romero.

The Executive Committee also passed an emergency resolution, *Tariffs Are Not 'Worth It'*, and advanced measures on rental fees and cancer disparities in the Latino community.



Above: NHCSL members in the United States Capitol. From left to right: U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez (FL) at the residence of Ambassador Ángeles Moreno; NHCSL President Rep. Angela Romero (UT) during 2025 Spring Executive Committee Meeting; Sen. Leo Jaramillo (NM), Rep. Carlos González (MA), Rep. Angela Romero (UT), Sen. Antonio Maestas (NM), Rep. Tara Luján (NM), NHCSL Executive Director Kenneth Romero and Sen. Cindy Nova (NM); Rep. Louis Ruiz (KS) with Kathleen Bush-Joseph of the Migration Policy Institute; Masimo's Paul Ordal, BBA Vice-Chair Javier González of Google, Rep. Lillian Ortiz-Self (WA), Rep. Louis Ruiz (KS) former BBA Chair Jamie Oldani of Eli Lilly, Atiba Madyun, Rep. Veronica Paiz (MI); Fred Zeytoonjian of Apple, Cencora's Cristina K. Muñoz, and BBA Chair Melissa Bishop-Murphy of Pfizer; Sen. Leo Jaramillo (NM) with U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján (NM); NHCSL Executive Director Kenneth Romero with Ambassador Ángeles Moreno; Rep. Fred Crespo (IL) addressing the Executive Committee; Rep. Carlos González (MA) addressing the Executive Committee with Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freyte (PA). Credits: NHCSL and David Stary.



HELPING THE FIGHT TO PREVENT OPIOID ADDICTION THROUGH LEGISLATION



By Sen. Wlmsvey Campos (OR)

The opioid epidemic continues to devastate Oregon, with overdose deaths reaching 1,480 in 2024 alone – that's 450 more than the previous year, with 80.7% of all deaths involving at least one opioid. Of that total, 113 deaths involved a prescription opioid. Across the country, approximately 80 million U.S. adults are prescribed acute pain medication annually, and about 40 million receive opioids to manage their pain.

While opioids can be effective, they also carry a risk of addiction. In fact, each year, approximately 85,000 patients develop opioid use disorder (OUD) within one year of starting an opioid treatment.

The rate of drug overdose deaths among Hispanic Americans continues to rise -- from 21.1 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 population in 2021 to 22.7 in 2022 -- while the rate of overdose deaths in the general population has been essentially flat during this period. A 1.6% increase may not sound like a lot, but it's over 1,000 deaths a year. Not only do we have to treat those fighting

addiction, we must work to prevent addiction in the first place.

In 2025, so-called pain parity legislation has been introduced in 30 states. In Oregon, I introduced Senate Bill 598 that ensures pain parity between non-opioids and opioids in both commercial insurance and in Medicaid. This legislation, signed into law by our Governor in July, will ensure an equal choice between non-opioid and opioids and would prevent prior authorizations or step therapy that often can delay or deny urgent pain treatment.

SB 598 is a crucial step toward modernizing pain treatment and policy. It ensures that insurance companies apply the same coverage rules for non-opioid pain management options as they do for opioids. This legislation will remove financial barriers, eliminate excessive red tape like prior authorization and step therapy, and empower health care providers to prescribe the most appropriate treatment for each patient — without defaulting to opioids.

By leveling the playing field, SB 598 will expand access to safer pain management options, reduce opioid dependence and help curb addiction before it starts.

The need for reform is urgent. Millions of Americans become persistent opioid users each year following surgery, not because they seek opioids, but because

these were prescribed when safer, non-addictive treatments were unavailable or unaffordable. Our health care system should not be steering patients toward addiction simply because non-opioid alternatives are more expensive or harder to access.

Research shows that expanding access to non-opioid treatments can reduce opioid misuse, addiction, and overdose deaths — saving lives and lowering health care costs. SB 598 is a commonsense policy that would give patients real choices for pain management while helping to curb the overprescription of opioids in Oregon.

The opioid crisis is not just a public health emergency — it is a preventable tragedy. We must prioritize upstream prevention by ensuring that safe, effective and non-addictive pain management options are as accessible and affordable as opioids. Passing a bill like SB 598 in your state is a crucial step in the right direction.

With this law, I am optimistic that we can take action now to protect patients, reduce opioid dependence, and create a healthier future for Oregonians. I urge my colleagues at NHCSL to draw from our Res. 2024-08 *Removing Barriers to Access to Alternative Therapies for the Treatment of Pain* and support critical legislation like this in their states.



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