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PRESS RELEASE

LATINO LEADERS RELEASE NATIONAL POLICY BLUEPRINT AT STATEWIDE SUMMIT

National and Regional Latino Leaders Discuss Significant Issues Affecting the Nation in Pivotal Election Year

Chicago – *An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective*, a set of well-documented public-policy tools to highlight Latino contributions and present a unified Latino voice in areas including education, health, youth, immigrant integration, and community development, was released today at the inaugural Latino Policy Summit hosted by the Latino Policy Forum, the former Latinos United.

The Agenda is the culmination of a two-year process that brought together more than 600 Latino leaders, religious organizations, business groups, elected officials, and community activists to create a national policy blueprint designed to increase America's cultural, political, and economic strength by addressing the increasing principal role that Latinos will play in the nation's future.

"What we are talking about today is a policy for moving all Americans forward, not just Latinos," said Congressman Luis Gutierrez (D-IL). "Americans deserve laws that are worthy of our great nation, and that includes an immigration policy that allows people to come out of the shadows and work here legally and safely and humanely. We all deserve a policy that is predicated on family values, keeping husbands and wives, parents and children together."

The Latino Policy Summit was sponsored by the National Council of La Raza, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, the National Institute for Latino Policy, National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, and Latinos United, and was hosted by The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

"This policy model has solutions that come from our community but will help all communities," said Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, Board President of Latinos United. "If we don't initiate new policies that impact inadequate educational systems, housing discrimination, the shambles that is our healthcare system, and continue to ignore the need to invigorate our political process, then this entire country is going to be in real trouble."

An American Agenda from a Latino Perspective

Cutting Edge Policy Solutions to Urgent Issues

The *American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* is a collective document whose public policy initiatives stress that Latinos are not outsiders but Americans, whose futures are intertwined with that of the entire country in pursuit of freedom, happiness, fairness, and equity for all.

"2008 is a critical year for the Latino community. The Latino vote is more important and powerful than ever. We must base our votes on issues and hold elected officials accountable to their commitment to Latino issues," said John Trasviña, President and General Counsel of MALDEF, the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund.

A sampling of the policy blueprint's key recommendations include:

- **Education Reform:** Making Head Start, Pre-School for All and other early education programs more available by making them full day programs for parents with non-traditional work schedules. Policy makers should increase funding for education to both build and repair schools, focusing first on the most underserved and neglected school districts.
- **Housing:** HUD and other governmental agencies to ensure set-asides in new developments. A series of reforms to eliminate predatory lending. Initiatives that will encourage employer-assisted housing programs and affordable housing trust funds.
- **Immigration:** Immigration policies should keep families together. Immigration does not happen in isolation of other policies, reforming NAFTA and other free trade treaties would greatly reduce the incentive to cross the border illegally.
- **Health and Social Services:** Affordable quality health insurance must be accessible to all Illinois residents. Public health agencies must work with community-based organizations to expand preventive care programs, bilingual availability to drug and alcohol intervention and treatment programs and counseling programs to address depression and other mental health issues.
- **Workforce and Economic Development:** The state of Illinois should fund employer-based training and English classes. Scholarships should be available for continuing professional development that enables foreign professionals to advance in their chosen profession.
- **Leadership Development and Civic Participation:** Government and philanthropic organizations should allocate funds to ensure that eligible immigrants receive appropriate classes and support to become naturalized citizens.
- **Community Safety:** Intercultural programs that address issues of both immigrant integration and racism. Conflict resolution and the expansion of parks and recreation funding. Local police should not be involved in immigration enforcement as it undermines public safety by forcing immigrants to avoid providing police officials with information on criminality and makes them more vulnerable to the criminal element.

"The *American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* is an invitation to collaboration," said Maricela Garcia, Executive Director of Latinos United. "Its findings and recommendations address long-standing barriers to equity and opportunity that afflict not just the Latino community but all American communities on some level."

Panel Discussions Bring a Latino Perspective to National Issues

Latino Leaders Define and Discuss Key Issues in this Election Year

In addition to the release of the *American Agenda from a Latino Perspective* policy blueprint, the Latino Policy Summit also featured national and regional discussion panels touching on issues of importance to Latinos in Illinois and across America as they relate to the Agenda. Latino leaders who shared their perspectives today included:

- Congressman **Luis Gutierrez**
- City Clerk of Chicago **Miguel del Valle**
- **Jesus “Chuy” Garcia**, President, Latinos United Board of Directors
- **Maricela Garcia**, Executive Director, Latinos United
- **Brent A. Wilkes**, Executive Director, League of United Latin American Citizens
- **John Trasviña**, President & General Counsel, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- **Angelo Falcón**, President, National Institute for Latino Policy
- **Antonio Gonzalez**, Convener, National Latino Congreso & President, William C. Velasquez Institute
- **Eric Rodriguez**, Deputy Vice President, National Council of La Raza
- **Claudia Lucero**, Midwest Coordinator, National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
- **Raul Raymundo**, Executive Director, The Resurrection Project
- **Ann Alvarez**, Executive Director, Casa Central
- **Gonzalo Arroyo**, Director, Family Focus Aurora
- **Ric Estrada**, Director, Erie House
- **Maria Pesqueira**, President and CEO, Mujeres Latinas en Acción
- **Juan Salgado**, President, Instituto del Progreso Latino
- **Michael Rodriguez Muñoz**, Editor, La Voz del Paseo Boricua, and
- **Sylvia Puente**, Director, Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives for the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies and Vice President, Latinos United Board of Directors

"This policy blueprint goes beyond immigration to highlight that a Latino policy agenda also includes quality education, adequate housing, access to health care and a prosperous future for our children," said Sylvia Puente, Director of the Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives for the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies.

Latinos United has a mission to build the power, influence and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well being of our community and society as a whole. For more information, please visit www.latinosunited.org.

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