

PRESS RELEASE

Contact:

Sara McElmurry, Latino Policy Forum 312-351-3890, smcelmurry@latinopolicyforum.org

Catherine Salgado, ICIRR, 630.362.6202, csalgado@icirr.org

Latino vote pivotal in close mid-term elections

Leaders urge community to flex their political muscle this E-Day

Chicago – October 27, 2010 – Unprecedented buzz around national campaigns – both encouraging and discouraging Latino voters from turning out to the voting booth on November 2 – illustrate not only the growing power of the Latino vote in this country, but also the critical nature of the issues at stake in mid-year elections.

With the effects of Illinois' state-wide financial crisis devastating local Latino communities and the non-profit organizations that serve them, and the future of federal immigration policy dictated by shifting Congressional power, Latino leaders are calling for all eligible Latino voters – representing more than 8 percent of eligible voters in the state, the tenth-largest Latino eligible voter share nationally¹ – to make their voices heard on November 2. As mid-term races are projected to be very close, Latinos – representing nearly 400,000 voters in Illinois – are positioned to be an important swing vote.

“Latinos came out to the polls in unprecedented numbers in 2008,” said Juan Salgado, president and CEO of the Instituto del Progreso Latino. “But in many ways, the issues at stake in 2010 – investment in our communities, tackling the issues of late payments to Latino-serving nonprofits, and, of course, immigration – are of even more importance to local Latino communities. It’s absolutely critical that all eligible Latino voters make their voices heard on November 2.”

While the outcome of all mid-term elections – from the high-stakes face-off for Governor to smaller contests in local municipalities – has implications for Metro Chicago Latinos, local Latino leaders stress that voters educate themselves on candidates in three especially key races:

Governor: The state’s fiscal crisis continues to devastate communities across the state, and Illinois Latinos are among the most dramatically affected. Representing a full 15 percent of the state’s population, Latinos-serving organizations receive just 5.5 percent of state grants, according to analysis from the Latino Policy Forum, and this disproportionately-small piece of the funding pie is at risk for being further reduced without additional revenue enhancements.

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¹ Pew Hispanic Center, “Latinos in the 2010 Elections: Illinois,” October 15, 2010.

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“Illinois has made significant budget cuts, borrowed money, leveraged federal funding, and tinkered with modest revenue generators. But the bottom line is that the coffers are still dry. A deeper fix is needed,” said Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum. “Our next governor must make a brave commitment to adopting a comprehensive solution to our state’s budget deficit. That solution must include revenue enhancements, lest the Latino community and all Illinoisans continue to suffer.”

Comptroller: The state’s fiscal woes have caused a well-documented backlog in payments, with a recent study ranking Illinois highest in late payments owed to nonprofits.² Latino-serving community organizations are faced with the prospect of serving a rapidly-growing community – Latinos represented 90 percent of Illinois’ growth over the past decade – with increasingly-dwindling and delayed resources. Numerous Latino-serving organizations have been faced with layoffs, furlough days and even permanent closing for better part of the past year.

“Candidates for Comptroller have dramatically-different visions for how the state will pay these long-overdue bills,” said Maria del Socorro Pesqueira, president and CEO of Mujeres Latinas en Acción. “Latino voters need to educate themselves on each candidate’s proposed approach and decide what is best for their communities and the organizations that serve them.”

Senate: As 69 percent of Illinois’ Latino eligible voters are US-born, and 31 percent are naturalized US citizens³, immigration reform remains a critical issue area for the Latino community. However, as partisan, political maneuvering in Congress has stalled just, practical immigration on multiple occasions – most recently, in a mid-September vote on a defense appropriations bill that carried the popular DREAM Act as an amendment – the race for President Obama’s former US Senate seat has critical implications for the possibility of immigration reform in the future.

“No matter where you stand on immigration reform, we can all agree that partisan politics have kept practical, just reform hostage for long enough,” said Maricela Garcia, director of capacity building with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). “President Obama promised immigration reform in 2008, but a fix to our long-broken immigration system has proven difficult – if not impossible – to get through Congress. We must evaluate our US Senate candidates on their commitment to seriously addressing at this issue, not just voting along party lines. Accepting the status quo on immigration is devastating not only to immigrants and their families, but to this entire country.”

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² Urban Institute, October 7, 2010.

³ Pew Hispanic Center, “Latinos in the 2010 Elections: Illinois,” October 15, 2010.

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Over the past decade, the power of the Latino vote has grown considerably in Illinois, from 218,000 voters in 2000 to 314,000 in 2008, an increase of 44 percent, according to analysis from the Latino Policy Forum. As a percentage of the overall Illinois vote, the Latino vote has steadily increased from 4.3 percent in 2000 to 5.2 percent in 2004 and 6.5 percent in 2008. Latinos account for more than 8 percent of eligible voters this year, according to Pew Hispanic Center.

“As Latino voters are considerably younger than voting groups in Illinois, the power and importance of the Latino vote will continue to grow in upcoming elections,” said Michael Rodriguez, executive director of Enlace Chicago. “We’re at a point where 1-in-3 Chicagoans under the age of 30 is Latino, and a full 90 percent of Latino children are US-born. The 2010 election represents the tip of the iceberg in terms of Latino presence in the voting booth.”

Voter mobilization efforts by community organizations, including the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute (USHLI) and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) have registered a combined 233,000 immigrant and Latino voters, or about half of the eligible Latino voter population.

This year, ICIRR’s non-partisan voter mobilization campaign, “One Nation, One Dream,” launched in July has registered 10,533 new voters and is planning to mobilize 133,128 immigrant voters to the polls on Election Day.

“Strong turnout numbers for Latino voters have implications beyond these mid-term elections,” said Artemio Arreola, political director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee rights. “These same voters will elect Chicago’s next mayor, and will also be considered during the much-discussed redistricting process in the Illinois General Assembly. There has never been a more critical time for Latinos to make themselves represented at the voting booth.”

For more information on where to vote, how to register, or analysis on the issues, visit www.icirr.org or call 312.344.2232.

Co-sponsored by: Alivio Medical Center, Casa Michoacán, Chicago Commons, El Hogar del Niño, Enlace Chicago, Grupo SALTO, Healthcare Alternative Systems, Inc., Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Illinois Latino Agenda, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Latino Education Alliance, Latino Policy Forum, Latinos Progresando, League of United Latin American Citizens, MALDEF, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, National Council of La Raza – Chicago Office, Northeastern Illinois University-El Centro Campus, Puerto Rican Agenda, The Resurrection Project, United States Hispanic Leadership Institute, and Universidad Popular.

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