

A Tribute to the Latino Community in Honor of Hispanic Heritage Month  
U.S. Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-34)  
September 26, 2008

Madam Speaker, in observance of Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15), I rise today to pay tribute to the growing, enterprising and dynamic Latino community.

Today, you need only look at recent statistics to recognize the growing influence of the Latino community.

This year, the Latino population has grown to more than 45 million people in the United States. By 2050, the Latino population is projected to go up to 132 million, constituting 30 percent of the nation's population.

Economically, Latinos own more than 1.6 million businesses in the country, generating \$222 billion in revenue at a growth rate that is triple the national average. In addition, by 2010, the purchasing power of the Latino community is projected to skyrocket from 600 billion to a trillion dollars. Clearly, this proven work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit will enable Latino businesses and workers to play an even bigger role in sustaining and strengthening our nation's economy in years to come.

Politically, Latinos are making significant gains, especially as representation in elected offices at all levels of government continues to increase. Currently, according to the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, more than 6,000 Latinos are providing leadership in elected and appointed offices throughout the country.

While I am very proud of the many Latino leaders who are standing up for their communities by assuming important positions of leadership, we must keep working to increase our representation. According to a new report compiled by the University of Denver, the number of Latinos holding public office is disproportionately low given that the Latino population is the largest minority group. The report states, "Very few Latinos have ever been appointed to serve in high-ranking posts or cabinet positions. No Latino has ever been appointed to the Supreme Court. Only during the last twenty years have Latino leaders begun to occupy cabinet positions ... A handful of Latinos have held such positions ... Still, the participation of Latinos in the administration is below what should be expected relative to the population."

Without question, the commitment of Latino leaders to equity in this country has inspired all of us to do the work that we do with heart and compassion. I am inspired by the words of the late Chicana author, Gloria Anzaldúa, who wrote, "The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react."

On May 1, 2006, Latinos came out by the millions and took to the streets stating, "Today we march, tomorrow we vote." They kept their promise and in the November 2006

election, the country saw the largest turnout of Latino voters for a midterm election. This November, with the growing population and increased numbers of registered voters, the Latino community will have a vital role in selecting the new president of the United States. According to the University of Denver report, 93 percent of Latino registered voters plan to vote in the upcoming election.

With increasing political clout in the halls of state legislatures and in the voting booth, Latinos will continue to be agents of social and political change in this country.

For example, since the start of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress under the leadership of the new Democratic majority, Congress has passed key legislation that directly benefits the Latino community. Congress authorized Recovery Rebates that went out to 130 American households – including many Latino households – to help revitalize the economy. Congress increased the minimum wage, directly benefiting 2.3 million Latinos over the next several years. Congress increased unemployment benefits at a crucial time when the Latino unemployment rate was at 8 percent. More recently, Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act, an important piece of legislation that will help many Latino students pursue a higher education.

Under Democratic leadership, Congress has made strides in addressing the needs of Latino families. But we must not rest. This election cycle provides all of us in the Latino community with a critical opportunity to move our agenda forward. With responsive representation in all levels of government including the Executive Branch, the Latino community can better use its leverage to make progress on key priorities. These priorities include increased access to high quality education, greater access to quality health care and comprehensive immigration reform.

As we observe Hispanic Heritage Month, I ask my colleagues to please join me in recognizing the growing political empowerment and activism in the Latino community. Now more than ever, we must work together, organize, and, above all, vote, to make our voices heard this November.

###