



## **HNBA 2017 LEGISLATIVE AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES**

### **1. Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

The time is now for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform with the potential to improve the lives and livelihoods of millions of families. HNBA advocates for a comprehensive reform bill that will ensure all people are treated with dignity and fairness. The legislation should, among other things, provide a clear path to citizenship for those previously granted DACA and those who qualified under the proposed DAPA guidelines and forbid militarization of the border and criminalization of immigrants. The President's Executive Action on immigration should be incorporated into legislation to ensure that relief from deportation is provided for those eligible.

### **2. Voting Rights**

One of the bedrock rights in our democracy is the right to vote. In recent years, attempts have been made to restrict access to the polls through strict voter identification laws, expensive documentary proof of citizenship (the current cost is \$555), barriers to voter registration, failure to comply with the Voter Registration Act, reduced early voting opportunities, failure to provide language access, and a judicial assault on the Voting Rights Act. HNBA opposes these efforts, which make it more difficult for Latinos to vote at a time when our growing population is reaching unprecedented levels of civic participation. The HNBA advocates for passage of the Voting Rights Advancement Act.

### **3. Timely Confirmation of Diverse Judges to the Federal Bench and Diverse Nominees to the Executive Branch**

Our system of justice cannot function effectively when significant judicial vacancies plague our courts, creating judicial emergencies across the country, or when the courts lack the diversity necessary to inspire the confidence and respect of a diverse nation. The HNBA has worked vigorously to identify, endorse, and advocate for qualified judicial nominees to fill the numerous vacancies in the federal court system. The HNBA supports the timely consideration of all judicial nominees.

As the demographics of America continue to change, so too must the face of our government. Including Latinos at all levels of the federal workforce enables our government to better execute policies that will effectively reach and serve Latino citizens. HNBA advocates for the nomination of diverse leaders to fill executive branch positions and for the Senate to hold confirmation votes without undue delay.

#### **4. Criminal Justice Reform**

The United States is home to 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prisoners, spending \$80 billion a year to keep people in prison. The HNBA supports criminal justice reform efforts to address the following:

- Improve Community/Police Relations
- Introduce Use of Body Cameras in a context that properly addresses privacy and fourth amendment issues, data storage and retention, open records laws, police training, and other appropriate regulations
- Better empirical data regarding success and failures of released prisoners' re-entry programs
- Adequate funding for re-entry programs that have proven to be successful
- Support programs that allow inmates to obtain GED or high school diploma and tech training
- Expungement of criminal records for certain lower felony offenses after a certain time period, where research demonstrates there is very low chance of recidivism ("redemption time")
- Support programs that provide and foster support systems for inmates (family days, etc)
- Sentencing guidelines, especially as they apply to juveniles; and also the DOJ's Clemency Project, which seeks to address prior sentencing disparities through a reinvigorated use of clemency;
- "Ban the box" on applications for employment;
- Solitary confinement, especially regarding youth

#### **5. Employment Non-Discrimination**

Even though the Supreme Court's *Obergeffell* 's ruling brought marriage equality to all 50 states, 31 states still lack clear, fully inclusive non-discrimination protections for LGBT people, meaning that despite the ruling, LGBT people can get legally married but still be at risk of being denied services or be fired from employment or evicted from housing for who they are. The HNBA supports *The Equality Act*, which establishes explicit, permanent protections against discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity in matters of employment, housing, access to public places, federal funding, credit, education, and jury service.

#### **6. Equal Pay & Minimum Wage-**

According to the US Labor Department, in 2014 women working full time in the US were paid on average 83 percent of what men were paid. For Latinas, the pay gap is wider (54% according to a 2016 study by the National Partnership for Women and Families). The HNBA supports legislation that would require employers to pay employees equally for substantially similar

work, even if their titles are different or they work at different sites. The HNBA also supports efforts to establish a fair minimum wage for workers.

## **7. STEM –**

The Obama administration articulated a clear priority for STEM education, with a call on the nation to develop, recruit, and retain 100,000 STEM teachers and for colleges and universities to graduate an additional 1 million students with STEM majors in the next 10 years. Latinos/as are currently underrepresented in undergraduate and graduate STEM programs and are not sufficiently exposed to STEM subjects at the K-12 levels. Currently less than 2 percent of the STEM workforce is Latino/a (while almost 20 percent of the country's youth population is Latino/a). The HNBA supports funding for program initiatives that expose Latino/a students to STEM-focused education and careers at earlier ages, and are designed to increase the number of Latino/as and other low-income and minority students attaining degrees in STEM fields.

## **8. Lifeline Assistance Program Expansion to Broadband-**

The Lifeline Assistance Program, enacted during the Reagan administration, provides a discount to help low-income households afford basic telephone service. On March 31, 2016, the Federal Communications Commission voted to make the discount available for broadband access as well, bringing Lifeline into the 21st century and acknowledging that Internet access is a basic necessity. Broadband Internet access is now critical to how we do business and communicate, but is not available to many in our communities. In addition to covering access to broadband, the proposal also reins in waste, fraud, and abuse by creating a convenient eligibility verifier and taking that responsibility away from self-interested carriers. That way, eligible consumers can apply the discount toward any number of Lifeline broadband products. As the modernized Lifeline program rolls out starting in December 2016, it will give many Latinos/as opportunities for social and economic advancement that are not now possible without broadband access. The HNBA supports the FCC modernization of Lifeline and will support outreach efforts to enroll as many eligible households as possible.

## **9. Legal Representation of Refugees**

With the influx of refugees from countries around the world, including unaccompanied minors, the HNBA supports funding to provide these refugees with access to legal representation to protect their rights.

## **10. Puerto Rico**

Since the economy in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, began to contract in 2006, it has shrunk by more than 10 % and employment on the Island has fallen by 14 %. Over the last decade, Puerto Rico's government has laid off close to 30,000 employees, closed nearly 200 schools, raised taxes, and reformed pension funds. During the same time, more than 300,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the U.S. mainland, substantially

reducing the Island's tax revenue. These factors, among others, have combined to create an economic crisis, with a staggering \$72 billion debt amid a historic economic crunch. In June of 2016, Congress passed and the President signed the PROMESA Act. PROMESA seeks to provide a mechanism through which Puerto Rico can restructure its debt. PROMESA also created a Financial Oversight and Management Board ("the Board"), with broad supervisory powers over the finances of the Commonwealth. HNBA advocates for prompt action on the part of the Board to complete its work as soon as possible, enabling Puerto Rico to swiftly complete the restructuring of its debt, and to return control of the Commonwealth's finances to the duly elected Government of Puerto Rico. HNBA also advocates for action on the part of the White House and Congress to provide Puerto Rico with the necessary tools to return to economic prosperity.

## **11. Cuba**

President Obama began the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba on December 17, 2014 and has since acted through executive authority to bring about greater cooperation on a multitude of issues affecting Cubans on the island, and Cuban-Americans in the United States. To that end, the United States and Cuba have reopened embassies in Washington, D.C. and Havana; six United States cabinet secretaries have visited Havana and four Cuban ministers have visited Washington, D.C. since December 17, 2014. In addition, the United States and Cuban governments created a Bilateral Commission that has resulted in non-binding agreements addressing areas of mutual concern, including public health, biomedical research, trade and travel, counternarcotics, environmental protection, direct mail, civil aviation, civil rights, hydrography, and agriculture. The HNBA supports ongoing engagement between the United States and Cuba, consisting of, but not limited to, mutually beneficial trade, investment, cultural exchange, claims reconciliation, and co-equal commitment to human rights. Furthermore, the HNBA supports action by the incoming administration of President-Elect Trump to continue the ongoing engagement towards Cuba, and opposes a reversion to Cold War-era politics between the United States and Cuba.

## **12. Hate Crimes**

Since the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, there have been numerous and continuous media reports of harassment- by way of intimidation, slurs, and attacks- towards individuals based on their race, ethnic origin, or sexual identity. Additionally, the FBI reported that in 2015 there was an increase of 6% in hate crimes against all minority groups, and yet these statistics gave an incomplete picture because the reporting and tracking of hate crimes is not fully adequate. In light of these statistics and threats, the HNBA supports federal efforts to improve the reporting and tracking of hate crimes; supports federal and state efforts to create educational and engagement partnerships with local communities, aimed at reducing these incidents and crimes; and calls on the federal government to vigorously enforce the Hate Crimes Act.

## **13. Racial Profiling**

There is a substantial body of academic research, official and media investigations, and court rulings, that suggest that a person's race or ethnicity is likely to affect the person's

experience with the police. As an example, in Chicago a recent 2016 Police Accountability Task Force found that blacks and Hispanic drivers were searched four times as often as white drivers, yet the data showed that contraband was found on white drivers twice as often as black and Hispanic drivers. Similar reports exist for many other cities. The HNBA opposes any government efforts to legitimize racial profiling and supports federal legislation banning the practice of racial profiling.

#### **14. Economic Opportunity**

In October, 2015 the Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress issued a report titled: “The Economic State of the Latino Community in America,” which contained some key findings: i) the “typical” or median Hispanic worker earns 72% of what the “typical” non-Hispanic white earns; ii) Hispanic women earn 55 cents for every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men; iii) the median income of Hispanic households is \$42,500, nearly \$18,000 less than the median income of non-Hispanic white households; iv) the median net worth of Hispanic households is approximately one-tenth that of non-Hispanic white households; v) Hispanic households are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-Hispanic white households. The HNBA supports legislation and programs that would increase funding for domestic priorities in areas such as education, job training, infrastructure development, and other areas that would stimulate the economy and provide adequate jobs to allow a middle class to grow and prosper, along with program initiatives designed to ensure that Hispanics have access to the opportunities provided by these priorities.