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Panel Debates Importance of Hispanic Vote in Upcoming Election

New Book Released at Event Urges 40 Million Latinos to Exercise More Power

WASHINGTON, DC -- Today the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute held a panel discussion at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on the growing significance of Latino voters in the United States. Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) representing the Bush-Cheney campaign and Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) representing the Kerry-Edwards campaign served on the panel and discussed their strategies for garnering Latino support. Other panelists included Dr. Luis Olivas, professor at the Carey School of Business at Arizona State University, and Pulitzer-prize winning reporter Robert Montemayor.

The discussion coincided with the release of Montemayor's newest book, *Right Before Our Eyes: Latinos Past, Present & Future*. In this book, Montemayor provides an up-to-date examination of the widening role of Latinos in American life. The book also presents a specific call to action to the 40 million Latinos in the United States to wield economic and political power proportional to their growing influence.

The book is funded by The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, a non-partisan, nonprofit policy research organization at the University of Southern California.

In *Right Before Our Eyes*, Montemayor, assisted by former journalist Henry Mendoza, tells a compelling story of the Latino experience in America – among the country's oldest inhabitants yet also among its newest citizens. The book also paints a vivid picture of the Latino population as a growing economic, political and social force in the U.S.

At 40 million strong, Montemayor points out, Hispanics now account for 13.7 percent of the U.S. population – larger than the population of African Americans and Asian Americans – and their purchasing power of \$700 million a year, if viewed as a country, would rank ninth in the world, just behind Canada but ahead of Mexico and Spain.

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The book also underscores the political clout of the Latino community in this election year. Hispanics, the author notes, possess eight to ten million votes poised for the 2004 Presidential election and represent the critical swing vote in six states.

Ultimately, though, the book imparts a bugle call to Latinos and non-Latinos alike, insisting that it's time for America to truly embrace Hispanic leadership in business and politics. "This nation has changed and will continue to change, and this book identifies what must be done to ensure a future of shared destiny and proportional representation at all levels of society," writes Montemayor.

Among other issues, the book examines:

Leadership: Montemayor asks where is Latino representation at the highest levels of business, government – elected and appointed, medicine, research, in Ivy League schools, and in the courtroom? Where are Latino directors on the boards of Fortune 100 companies? He suggests compilation of an annual report that evaluates Hispanic representation on corporate boards and at the highest levels of management.

Politics: Noting the Latino community's up to eight million registered voters in 2004, Montemayor wonders if Hispanics can unify on political issues in a way that will benefit their community? "Can they wield their collective clout to put in place representatives who speak to their concerns?" he asks.

Media: The author asks such pertinent questions as how does the media portray Latinos and do the mainstream media speak to Hispanic issues? He wonders what would happen if the 40 million Latinos, plus another six-to-eight million illegal Latino residents bypassed the mainstream media entirely, "choosing instead to patronize outlets that actually serve their needs."

Education: Latinos, the author maintains, must convince PTAs, textbook publishers, bookstores and those responsible for curriculum development that education must speak more loudly about contributions of Latinos in matters of history, art, education, culture, politics, technology and leadership. New grant programs and other funding mechanisms must support new Latino initiatives.

Economics: Latinos must be more aware of how and where they spend their dollars and press local businesses to improve their hiring practices at all levels and funnel their profits back into the community, Montemayor contends.

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Health Care: One of every three U.S. Hispanics has no medical or dental insurance and that percentage is higher for Latino youth under age 18, the author emphasizes. He asserts that the health-care crisis among Latinos will only worsen if it's left unaddressed, leaving the sick and injured untreated and costing taxpayers billions in health-care costs.

Montemayor emphasizes that while Latinos are viewed often as one homogeneous group, with the common link of the Spanish language, they actually are as diverse and fiercely individualist as any of the clans of Europe who settled in the U.S. over time.

"For centuries, we have lived quietly, almost invisibly, while our numbers have grown exponentially. We speak Spanish and English, although the latter with an accent or varying degrees of fluency," he writes.

Right Before Our Eyes is an important contribution to the past – and the future – contributions of a proud, hard-working community that will continue to add to the richness and beauty of the American landscape. And, most importantly, the book spotlights the need to develop the potential that exists in this community.

Published Sept. 17, the book costs \$18.95 and will be available at bookstores and on the Web at www.amazon.com.

About the Authors:

ROBERT MONTEMAYOR wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* for many years, serving as a major contributor to the newspaper's series on the subject of Latinos. That series won the 1984 Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Meritorious Public Service. He also was a member of three other reporting teams nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He has a Master of Business Administration degree in marketing from UCLA and a Bachelor of Arts degree in marketing from Texas Tech University. For the past three years, he has been the founder and principal in Montemayor Consulting. He lives in Bloomfield, N.J., with his wife, Virginia Lujano.

HENRY MENDOZA, a former print and electronic journalist, helped form the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and is a former president of the California Chicano News Media Association. He is a former news director at KBAK-TV in Bakersfield, Calif.

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