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EMBARGOED UNTIL
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2007

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REPORT:
LOCAL LEADERS FOCUS ON
INTEGRATION OF LATINOS IN SUBURBS
Call for dialogue to promote unity in diversity

What: Presentation on *Forging the Tools for Unity: A Report on Metro Chicago's Mayors Roundtables on Latino Integration.*

Who: Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and the University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies, Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives. Mayors of Addison, Palatine, Northlake, Blue Island, Elgin, Carpentersville, Mt. Prospect and over 200 civic, community, faith, school leaders and elected officials.

When: Monday, November 19, 2007, registration 8:30 am, presentation 9:30–11:30 am

Where: Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 230 S. LaSalle, Chicago, IL (allow enough time to pass through security and bring identification)

CHICAGO – In the wake of major demographic changes that make Latinos the region's fastest-growing group, a broad-based dialogue on the incorporation of the Latino community in the Chicago metropolitan area is emerging and will target key issues including housing, education and the dearth of social services, according to a new report by the Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus.

Earlier this year, these groups convened nearly 150 civic, community, faith, and municipal leaders for roundtables that promoted understanding between the Latino and non-Latino community, identified current realities, and suggested potential strategies that can make an impact as Latinos strive to meet the challenge of integrating into suburban Chicago-area communities. The summary proceedings for the roundtables were released on Monday, November 19.

The region's changing landscape is especially apparent when one compares the suburbs to the city. For example, now, for the first time, more Latino children attend suburban school districts than schools in the City of Chicago.

The roundtables involved leaders and addressed issues facing a wide variety of communities, including Addison, Aurora, Berwyn, Blue Island, Carpentersville, Cicero, Elgin, Joliet, Palatine and Waukegan.

Changing Story

The story that Latinos are the fastest-growing group in the region—and country—is already a familiar one. In the Chicago area, Latinos are now the region’s largest racial and ethnic minority, comprising 20 percent of the total population.

What is happening now, though, is a new and dynamic story about how Latinos and leaders from area suburban communities are coming together to tackle challenging issues. That challenge, the report suggests, will best be met by a two-way process that involves immigrants *and* members of their receiving communities. The goal is to foster communities that are diverse and cohesive at the same time.

While the roundtables were held at a time of debate over federal immigration policy, the concern here targets immigration integration policy in local communities.

“We have learned, more than ever before, about the need for dialogue and leadership as we move forward to incorporate Latinos into the region,” said Sylvia Puente, Director of the Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives of Notre Dame’s Institute for Latino Studies. “There is great potential for Latinos and communities to work together in positive ways.”

“Many municipalities face similar challenges in the process of incorporating their growing Latino populations,” added Larry Hartwig, Mayor of the Village of Addison and Chair of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Diversity Issues Task Force. “What we have done with these Roundtables is bring together municipal officials and local Latino leaders to engage in a dialogue across communities.”

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Growing Impact of Latinos

Trends show the growing impact of Latinos on the region and the suburbs. One look at suburban counties, for example, shows that *almost all counties in the region have experienced a higher percentage increase in the number of Latinos in the last six years than Chicago.*

Meanwhile, the impact of Latinos on the Chicago-area economy can also be seen in a variety of other key indicators:

- Latinos are responsible for 15 percent of the region's labor force and half of the growth in owner-occupied homes;
- Bilingual Latinos offer a unique opportunity to tap the \$2.4 trillion market of the world's 21 Spanish-speaking country; and

"Promoting the integration of the Latino population in the region capitalizes on these economic contributions," according to the report.

Potential Strategies to Address Demographic, Economic Impact

The roundtable recommended a range of potential strategies to address the demographic and economic impact of Latinos in the area and promote understanding of immigrant integration. Key strategies include supporting mayors in areas of high Latino concentration, and linking state-endorsed immigration initiatives and local efforts. Other strategies addressed the everyday life of communities by calling on the region to highlight diversity, create opportunities to promote understanding, and engage Latinos to get involved in public and civic life. The roundtable was also sensitive to language and culture issues, as it promoted opportunities for Spanish-speaking residents to learn English and emphasized cultural competency among those who serve the public.

Housing

It is no accident that the roundtables identified housing as a key issue: Latinos are responsible for 50 percent of the total increase in owner-occupied homes in the six-county Chicago Metropolitan Region, according to research presented in the report.

The impact of Latinos on homeownership trends in the suburban Chicago area is growing – especially when compared to their impact in the city. For example, *sixty percent of suburban Latino households are owner-occupied, compared to 43 percent of Latino households in the city of Chicago.*

Two key and often intertwined issues emerged from this process: affordability and overcrowding. The report zeroed in on why affordability is such a critical issue: "Latinos are particularly affected by the lack of affordable housing because they make up a large proportion of the lower end of the labor market. As a result, many Latinos cannot afford to live near their jobs, and choose to live with others—family members or unrelated persons—out of economic necessity." Meanwhile, "Nationally, 26 percent of Hispanic households are classified as crowded—compared to 8 percent of black and 4 percent of white households.

Housing: Potential Strategies

"We believe there are a number of potential housing strategies that can impact how Latinos are incorporated into our communities," said Hartwig. "For example, community education and partnerships between public and private sectors can make a major difference on housing issues."

The roundtable identified a range of potential strategies for Latinos who are buying a home as well as those who already live in a home in the community. Community-based policies that

could impact the process before families purchase a home include developing model education programs for tenants and buyers; partnering with developers who have worked with the Latino community; encouraging the development of diverse housing; requiring property inspections before a sale, and reinforcing affordable housing initiatives, including community housing programs. Flexible housing ordinances and community mediation services could also make a difference for buyers and tenants.

Education

Meanwhile, data show why education is also clearly a major issue for Latinos and suburban communities. The report shows the huge educational gap between Latinos and non-Latino whites in Illinois: In 2005, only 58 percent of Latino adults 25 and older had graduated from high school, compared to 92 percent of non-Latino whites.

Data also mirror broader demographic trends impacting the region: Latinos as a percentage of all school-age children is greater in 2005 than in 2000—as a whole, and in a wide range of communities covered by this report.

Key Issues: Language Acquisition and Proficiency

One of the most important areas for local leaders to confront will be education, and data shows why: In 2006, more than half (54 percent) of students who were Spanish-speaking with limited English proficiency were in the suburbs.

According to research cited in this report, there is a significant difference between how long it takes for immigrant children to acquire conversational fluency in their second language (about two years) and how long it takes for them to catch up with native speakers in academic aspects of a second language (five to seven years). “In the long run,” the report said, “the most effective model in preparing English Language Learners [those in the process of Learning English who have a first language other than English] for long-term academic success is two-way developmental bilingual education or dual language programs.”

Parental Involvement

For years, research has shown that parental involvement has an enormous impact on students—their attitude as well as their achievement. Latinos, though, face a number of challenges in this area, including language and cultural barriers and lack of understanding of the education system. As a result, the report said that “the most effective parent involvement programs focus on personal formation (focusing on individual needs of parents through GED programs, financial literacy, and so on) and civic engagement (fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility through meaningful volunteer opportunities and communication).”

The report also targeted the importance of enrollment issues impacting immigrant children—and how schools and districts must be conversant in current guidelines and documents that prove legal custody or residence.

Education: Potential Strategies

The roundtable recommended a number of potential education strategies. In the area of language acquisition, key strategies included increasing resources that would 1) expand the Illinois Resource Center’s Dual-Language Network to broaden information on best practices, and 2) provide planning dollars from the Illinois State Board of Education for schools and school districts to develop dual language programs. Other keys included increasing the pool of bilingual/bicultural teachers in suburban school districts and providing opportunities to local school districts to achieve cultural competency.

To encourage parental involvement, the roundtable recommended that school districts identify a staff person to serve as a liaison between parents and the school and develop a consistent parent program focused on personal formation and civic engagement. One key, however, is more basic: schools need to do more to facilitate a welcoming environment for immigrant parents by providing communication material in their native language and bilingual assistance.

Social Services

The lack of social services for Latinos in the suburbs also stands out, according to participants in the roundtable. “There is a dearth of organizations that provide social services in the suburbs, particularly to immigrants,” stated the report. “The lack of services has been exacerbated by the growth of the Latino population and an accompanying need for basic human services.”

The roundtable identified four models of service provision with local examples that show how these models work and can serve as models for other communities:

- **Community-based organization:** In Chicago, the Erie Neighborhood House, established in 1870, is a comprehensive social service agency that primarily serves Latinos and African Americans. The organization’s educational programs reach 4,500 participants annually.
- **One-Stop Social Service Collaborative:** In Palatine, the Palatine Opportunity Center consolidates a myriad of social services in one location. The organization, which was born out of a community planning process initiated in 1998, coordinates a variety of social services and serves thousands of people living and working in northeast Palatine.
- **School-Community Partnership:** At Addison Trail High School Latino community partners and the high school work together to expand the reach of education, create a safe environment for families, and challenge parents to participate in their child’s academic success. Every week more than 300 parents participate in personal formation and civic engagement educational activities.
- **Faith-Based Initiative:** The St. Joseph Catholic Church in Addison has provided a myriad of services, including English as a Second Language and citizenship classes, a marriage and family enrichment program, a food pantry, and bilingual assistance.

Strategies

To address the lack of social services that reach Latinos in the suburbs, the roundtable recommended a range of potential strategies that build on partnerships and collaboration between organizations. For example, the report suggested partnerships between established organizations (like Erie Neighborhood House) in Chicago and emerging organizations in the suburbs. Other possibilities include building a network of social service providers, disseminating best practices on immigrant integration, and providing a comprehensive array of social services in one location.

Next steps

The roundtable is an important step toward the incorporation of Latinos in suburban communities. Now, according to Puente, many involved in the process are moving ahead to target key issues and taking them to Latinos and leaders in various communities.

“We know there can be a lot of negative talk about immigration and how it is affecting our communities,” said Puente. “These roundtables are a positive approach that opens up a dialogue between Latinos and leaders of suburban communities in how to create a more cohesive region.”