

Latino Leaders Look for Changes in Bush Budget

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By Alex Meneses Miyashita

FRONT PAGE

community needs.

While Hispanics active in Washington claim that President Bush's proposed \$2.9 trillion Fiscal Year 2008 budget largely neglects the needs of their community, they hold out hope for some critical changes.

Unveiled Feb. 6, the Bush proposal reduces funding or eliminates programs in areas such as education, health, and labor which Hispanic advocates claim are essential in addressing

Among the quickest to react was Sen. Robert Menéndez (D-N.J.). "Fortunately, we're not stuck with President Bush's horrible first draft," he said.

Raúl González, legislative director for the National Council of La Raza, told Hispanic Link News Service that because the President's priorities are not shared by the new Congress, he anticipates some major

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President's Priorities are not Shared by the New Congress

LATINO LEADERS: Hoping for Changes in Bush's Budget

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revisions.

NCLR had sent a letter to Bush in December outlining areas where it considered social funding to be a priority. It called for better access to education, health care, and homeownership, plus programs to improve job skills, help immigrants integrate, and to enhance the Latino community's financial knowledge. It also suggested a few tax policy changes.

Gabriela Lemus, director of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, also told Hispanic Link that the new Democratic majority should proceed cautiously because it is not that big, "so they really need to come to some sort of bipartisan agreement."

Menéndez listed programs vi-

tal to his state's low-income residents, including educational access, health coverage, heating assistance, and housing revitalization.

The budget includes only small increases in funding for housing counseling and community health centers, but nothing beyond that, according to NCLR's González.

"There were lots of ways that the President could have used the budget to invest in the Latino community," González said. "The President is really doing nothing to create a Latino middle class."

Objections raised by NCLR and other groups include the elimination of educational programs involving parents and no additional funding to address the growing

number of limited-English-proficient students.

The LCLAA emphasized its concern over a \$695 million trim from job training programs, including cuts to the Workforce Investment Act, which it says would impact some 1.2 million Hispanics searching for jobs.

The organization also expressed dismay with proposed cuts of \$2.1 billion in education and the elimination of as many as 42 programs that largely benefit Latinos.

In the area of health, Medicare would be slashed by \$105 billion over 10 years and Medicaid by \$17 billion. Some 13.7 million Latinos lack health insurance, according to the LCLAA.

The Senate's lone Latino Re-

publican, Mel Martínez (Fla.), praised the budget, claiming among its virtues that it "calls for funds to address the lack of health insurance among our poorest and most vulnerable populations."

However, he added, "I will work to modify the President's request so that we can target a tax credit to those who wish to obtain, but cannot afford, health insurance."

The budget would add \$5 billion over five years to the State Children's Health Insurance Program, but analysts maintain it's not nearly enough to cover families who need it.

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