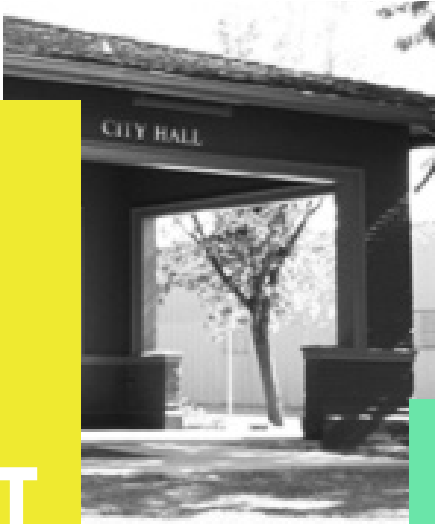




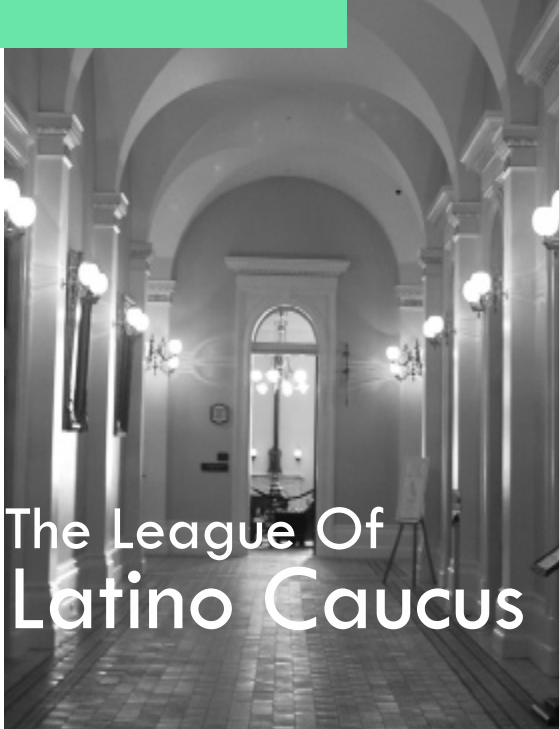
PROJECT



# EMPOWERMENT



A History Of  
California Cities -



The League Of  
Latino Caucus





# PROJECT EMPOWERMENT



A History Of The League Of  
California Cities-Latino Caucus



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In loving memory of Nell Soto.



This organization is the embodiment of Latino political empowerment in the state of California. In the last 20 years, Latinos have gained public office in every sector—especially city councils—and have used city councils as stepping stones to higher offices, such as the California state legislature. The Latino Caucus has not only been a place where councilmembers from various California communities have come together to aggregate their interests, but has also served as a training ground for higher office.

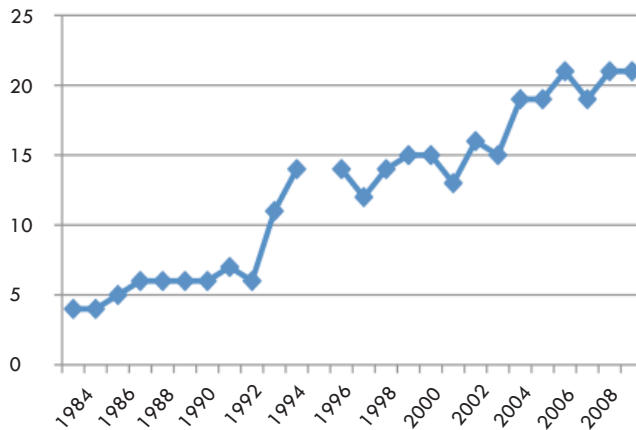
Of the 72 Latinos who have been in the state legislature since Phil Soto and John Moreno were first elected in 1962, over a third first served as councilmembers or mayors. What made these individuals ready for higher office was their city council experience along with their participation in regional and statewide organizations like the Latino Caucus. People like Rosario Marin, Huntington Park City Councilmember then U.S. Treasurer, Grace Napolitano, Norwalk City Councilmember now U.S. Congressman, and Jenny Orpeza, Long Beach City Councilmember now State Senator, among others, were not only officers of the Latino Caucus, but served on regional bodies like the Los Angeles County MPA and the Southern California Air Quality Management District. It is clear that the Latino Caucus has brought together Latino leaders and has projected their leadership beyond the city level. It has been a tremendous twenty years of success and the trend only indicates a greater significance for the Latino Caucus in the future.

Fernando J. Guerra, Ph.D.

Loyola Marymount University

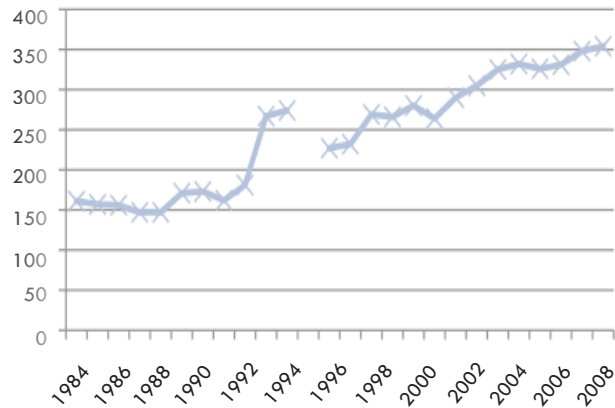
Director, Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles

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**Latino  
Mayors &  
Councilmembers  
in TOP TEN  
California Cities**

## Latino Mayors & Councilmembers in ALL California Cities



72 Latino individuals held positions in the California State Legislature

25 of the 72 were elected to a city council prior to entering the State Legislature

5 of the 72 were elected as mayors prior to entering the State Legislature

6 of the 72 were elected to a city council after leaving the State Legislature

1 of the 72 was elected as a mayor after leaving the State Legislature (Antonio Villaraigosa)

20 of the 23 members of the Senate were previously members of the State Assembly

1 of the 69 members of the Assembly was previously a member of the Senate (Richard Alarcon)

2 individuals held a position on the Assembly, moved to Senate, and then back to Assembly  
(Charles Calderon and Nell Soto)

2 Senators went on to become members of the U.S. House of Representatives after their terms  
in the State Senate (Joe Baca and Hilda Solis)

1 Senator went on to become the U.S. Secretary of Labor after her term in the State Senate (Hilda Solis)





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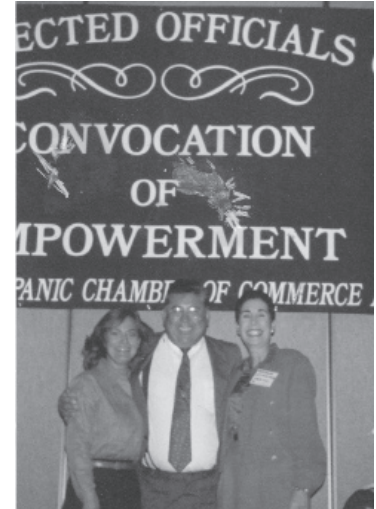
“When the Caucus was founded, a lot of the leadership was from the small rural communities because they understood early on that to go lobby Sacramento as an individual they couldn’t get anything done, but as a group they could do a lot more.”

—Henry T. Perea, Latino Caucus President



The fertile valleys of California have given rise to significant social and political activism over the course of the last century, especially in the struggles toward equal rights and representation for the state's diverse Latino populations.

In the late 1980s, several Latino elected officials, most of whom represented rural areas in the Central Valley, were interested in organizing an official Caucus to represent the needs of Latinos whose voices were largely unheard. Recently-elected Watsonville City Council Member Oscar Ríos and a group that included Nell Soto of Pomona, George Shirakawa, Victor Lopez and Roy Rodriguez of Orange Cove, and Rudy Garcia of Bell Gardens facilitated a meeting at the League of California Cities' 1990 Annual Summer Conference in Monterey.



“[The League] finally opened up. We were starting to make a little bit of noise and they decided to announce at a luncheon: ‘There is going to be a meeting for Latinos in such-and-such room.’ That’s where we went, in that little room. There were about twenty or thirty of us and we said, ‘Look, we need to get organized. We need to set up a structure and a Board and a president’...So right there I was elected President. That was about 1990.”

—Oscar Ríos, Founding Member  
& First Latino Caucus President



"I was about ready to go out and accept the appointment as [League of California Cities] Executive Director at our Annual Conference in 1972. There were several—2,000 people in the audience. It was a big moment for me...A friend tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Before you go out, I've got a group that would like to talk to you.' I go in and here are about twenty Latino representatives there to talk to me

about their role in the League. They said, 'We are interested in being more active. We are interested in being more of a moving agent within the organization,' which from my standpoint was very helpful and very much of a plus."

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"The constant person who guided and helped me to understand what the options were, what kind of role the Latino Caucus would play was Oscar Ríos...Later on, I asked Oscar what would be the best way of outlining what the Latino Caucus' function might be and how it would relate to the League. We didn't have any experience at that point, but he suggested we have a very small meeting. Oscar led the discussion and it was with our officers at the time...that was a very helpful meeting because the Latino Caucus really did not function on a regular basis until it was staffed."

"It took a long time. They would meet when there was an officer or a group of Latino elected [officials]. They would have lunch, but it was not official for all that period of time [1972-1990]. They never had a staff; it was a very informal relationship."

—Don Benninghoven,  
Former League of Cities Executive Director





“We were having some difficulties in terms of our acceptability as a Caucus. A lot of people who had been there thirty, thirty-five years saw us as a threat, as being separate, as being racist. We heard the whole gamut. We were really thinking about retiring from the Caucus and going out and becoming our own separate organization.”

—John E. Márquez,  
Founding Member



Unofficial until 1990, the Latino Caucus served as a voice for historically underrepresented communities and eventually gained official recognition as the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus, becoming the first organization of its kind in the state.

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“Once we got organized, we started insisting that the League understand the role of Latinos as elected officials, but also as a population to be dealt with in the state. So we asked, for example, for the opportunity to be on panels, because there were very few Latinos on panels, doing workshops. We asked for official recognition as a caucus of the League. That came a little bit later. We asked at one point for the opportunity to have Board Members sit on the League Board as well because there were no [Latino] Board Members—elected Board Members...The first conflict I can recall was around whether there should be a Latino Caucus at all. [The League] wanted us to cease to say that we were the Latino Caucus of the League of Cities. So we made a presentation to the Board and defended our right to have a Caucus and that we wanted to be part of the League, but if they insisted, that we would become our own organization. That quieted some of it.”

—Anna Caballero, California State Assembly Member  
& Past Latino Caucus President



# FOUNDING MEMBER

He is known to some as “Mr. Salt of the Earth” and it is a title this active labor organizer honors with pride and conviction. Oscar Ríos became familiar with the Watsonville City Council while helping to organize a major cannery workers’ strike in 1985, a strike that lasted two years and led to a lawsuit from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) against the city. News of the strike had reached the national media when Ríos and other organizers were invited to speak with city officials. “It was my first time in city hall...



# OSCAR RÍOS

It was very white,” he recalls. Sensing a vast disconnect between the diverse communities of Watsonville and the elected officials who governed them, Ríos set his sights on becoming involved. Others also saw the need for “a representative in the city to be a liaison to the community,” and chose him to fill that role. In a special ten-year anniversary profile of the Watsonville cannery worker strike, *El Andar Magazine* chronicled: “The strike empowered the Latino community’s political redistricting battle, which went to the Supreme Court. The Court’s decision on behalf of Watsonville’s 60 percent ethnic majority allowed, for the first time, a Latino to be elected to the Watsonville City Council.”

Two years later, election time returned and the San Andreas Fault shifted. It was 1989. Ríos had been campaigning when the earthquake nearly devastated his city. He watched as hundreds of residents gathered in the town plaza, many of whom had been cut off from relief efforts. Ríos took the opportunity to bridge language barriers and attempted to extend city and federal services to them. On this, his second visit to city hall, he was asked to leave with the threat of being escorted out by officials who claimed they had things under control. He recalls, “I turned and walked out, but I was even more determined.” Several months later, Oscar Ríos was elected to that same city council, the second Latino ever to assume the position.

Shortly after taking office, Ríos began attending League of California Cities’ events thanks to encouragement

from the then-city manager, Steve Solomon. At the League events, he met with several other Latino elected officials, most of whom represented rural centers in the Central Valley, who were interested in organizing. “They had a chorizo con huevo breakfast for the Hispanics. I went and it was pitiful,” Ríos commented in a recent interview. “A couple of them were saying, ‘We need to get together, to get organized. We need new volunteers. Who’s going to volunteer?’ So I raised my hand.” He and a group that included Nell Soto of Pomona, George Shirakawa, Victor Lopez and Roy Rodriguez of Orange Cove, and Rudy Garcia of Bell Gardens immediately began facilitating a meeting at the League’s 1990 Summer Conference in Monterey, where he remembers, “There were about 20 or 30 of us. We asked the League to give us a place to meet and there was a little bit of resistance. They finally opened up because we were starting to make noise and they decided to announce it at a luncheon: ‘There’s going to be a meeting for Latinos in such-and-such room.’ And that’s where we went. In that little room...Right there I was elected President.”

Before they could move forward with their new President, however, the group first had to gain official recognition as a League of California Cities’ Caucus. Or did they? Facing resistance from the one organization that spoke for local municipal interests throughout the state, the organization with which Latino interests should ideally be aligned, the group considered establishing their own separate entity as the Elected Women’s Group had done. Ríos remembers being part of the League Board of Directors and

consistently being tired of asking, “Why am I the only Latino who is raising issues for Latinos?” The founders and a rapidly growing membership, however, decided to stay with the League, fighting for a place at the table if need be. Eventually, their efforts paid off: “We were loud. That’s why they listened to us.”

Ríos continued to serve as President for the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus through its first formative years, pulling together a panel to set up the bylaws, recruiting an active—albeit volunteer—Executive Director and organizing a membership that had swelled around the Proposition 187

debate. President Ríos was instrumental in building the Latino Caucus up from a small, relatively unknown organization to a sanctioned Caucus that built alliances with the National Association for Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) and the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project. His primary concern was “raising it to a higher level and always trying to have a political perspective...It’s a Latino Caucus and being a Latino Caucus, we still have a lot of issues out there where Latinos are getting hit. We have to be in the forefront



taking stands. We need to be on the cutting edge.” Proposition 187, the 1994 ballot initiative aimed at denying California’s undocumented workers social services, health care, and public education, served as an ideal catalyst to unite local elected officials who did not agree with the anti-immigrant sentiment of the day. The Latino Caucus’ involvement with the League Board was successful in dissuading the umbrella organization from taking a position, effectively neutralizing

the League on this potentially divisive issue on the grounds that it was ultimately a state, not a local government matter. The success of their efforts propelled Caucus leaders to renew their commitment and challenge the organization to grow into its full potential.

President Ríos recognized the opportunity as a chance to step down from power and allow others, such as then-Salinas City Councilmember Anna Caballero, to lead. He continued on as an active member of the Watsonville City Council, representing District 2 as councilmember and serving four terms as Mayor. He now works with the Teamsters Union.



# FOUNDING MEMBER

In 1997, when the New York Times deemed Nell Soto and her husband Phil as being “at the forefront of virtually every Hispanic movement,” it was in reference to a lifetime of work on a variety of social justice issues and to their continuous breaking down of barriers. Nell Soto, who served as California State Senator from 2000-2006 and as Assemblywoman from 1998-2000 and 2006-2008, had become a “first” on many fronts, opening access to opportunities for the many who followed.



# NELL SOTO

She was indeed at the forefront when she and handful of local Latino elected officials came together to form the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus. Referred to endearingly as “Nellie” Soto by fellow founding members, the then-Pomona City Councilmember had already forged her way through discrimination and glass ceilings as a Latina, and she wanted to open the doors for others. Through the nascent group’s efforts, she helped usher in a new wave of leaders throughout the state, many of whom were serving as their city’s first Latina/o council members and mayors.

A Latino Caucus leader even before the group was made official, Nell Soto remained involved until her tenure in the State Legislature began. She played important roles in its formation and efforts to represent the concerns of California Latinos, as when the group authored and promoted a keystone Resolution on Immigration that was eventually passed by the League and considered by top state legislators. Eventually, once they had established an executive committee, Soto served a two-year term as Treasurer and Regional Representative from 1997 to 1999, when she began campaigning for the Assembly.

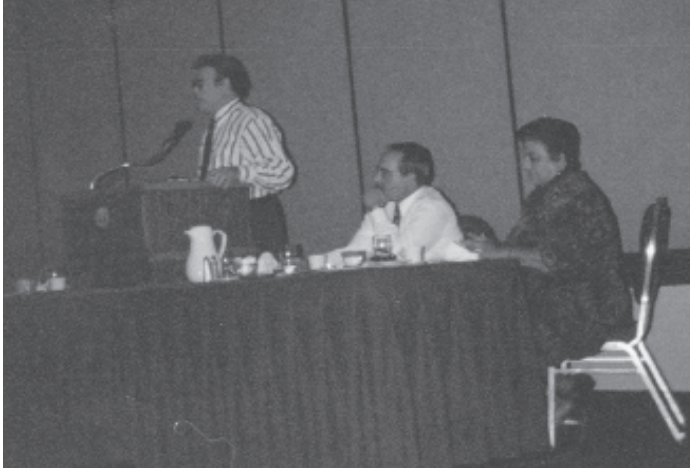
Even before becoming the first Democrat in twenty years to represent the state’s 61st Assembly District (parts of Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties),

Nell Soto’s career was exemplary, spanning nearly sixty years. Soto became politically active in the 1940s when she began walking precincts for Edward Roybal, elected Los Angeles’ first Latino City Council Member in a century.

For years, though, this powerhouse of a woman was relegated to the political shadows of her husband because, as she once told a reporter, “women just didn’t run in those days.” Phil Soto became the first mayor of La Puente after he and his wife organized a successful campaign to incorporate the area.

While aware of them, Nell Soto never let perceived limitations hold her back for long. Though she did not run for public office until 1986, she remained politically active alongside her husband in addition to holding leadership roles in the private sector. She headed up San Gabriel Valley’s first California Democratic Club and, in the 1970s, led a program in East Los Angeles that prepared young women to find employment in professional offices. In the meantime, she and her husband marched with Cesar Chavez in Delano and organized with the United Farm Workers Union. Soto later served as government affairs liaison for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and in 1993 was appointed





“Nell was very much a mother, grandmother figure to a lot of us. She had a fire in her belly...She realized that we needed to stay mainstream and be relevant, but she could still get on the horse and fire the weapons, so to speak. She really helped shape the image of the Caucus.”

—Sam Torres,  
Past Caucus President

to the Air Quality Management District Board. When finally she was ready to run for Pomona City Council, she won. She held the post from 1986 to 1998, when she became the first Latina from Inland Empire to be elected to the California State Legislature. She served in the State Assembly and Senate for the next ten years, focusing her efforts in committees on economic development, transportation, the environment and public pensions. She is also remembered as a strong advocate for children, working families and senior citizens, and has been credited with being one of the first Latina/o politicians to dedicate their career to environmental justice issues.

Upon her recent passing on February 26, 2009, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger remembered Soto as “a devoted public servant who committed her life to improving the lives of others in her community.” Legislative Latino Caucus Chair Gil Cedillo told members of the press, “She confronted racism head on with her eloquence and her passion for justice. We reaffirm our commitment for fighting and to move her vision forward in our lives and our work.” Indeed, Nell Soto will be remembered in high esteem by all who knew the caliber of her service and her unwavering commitment to all Californians.



# PAST PRESIDENT

Sam Torres' presidency from 1993 to 1995 brought great change and growth to the budding Latino Caucus. He was a leader determined for action, the first to organize the Caucus with an executive committee and staff members. The incoming Executive Director, John E. Arriaga, remembers him as "a maverick. He's the guy that comes in with a long ponytail, jeans and boots and just says, 'Okay, let's get this organization moving along and let's have fun while we're doing it. Get moving!'"



# SAM TORRES

“As our Caucus continues to grow, I feel we need to organize and structure ourselves in order to become as effective an organization as possible and make the most of our members’ abilities. To this end, a temporary executive committee has been set up to include the Caucus’ most active participants.”

–Sam Torres, from Summer 1995 Latino Caucus Newsletter’s Letter from the President

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Torres’ leadership made a lasting impression on the Caucus, which still functions with an active Board of Directors and full staff. Under his guidance and with the impassioned support of members from throughout the state, the Latino Caucus achieved one of its most impactful goals to date. As Torres reflected in his last newsletter feature as President, “I consider the Resolution on Immigration passed by the League of Cities and spearheaded by the Caucus as the most significant achievement of the past two years. I was pleased to note that the policy positions we labored over and the conclusions we reached were mirrored at the federal level. Whether the federal policies were affected by our own senators and congressmembers who had read our resolution, or whether ‘great minds think alike,’ I don’t know. While time consuming, this particular endeavor was quite a success.”

Hailing from the small Southern California community of Perris, Torres was a young and highly motivated city council member. Maria Alegria, who was an active Caucus member at the time, recalls his ability to generate excitement when the obstacles were many. “He was the poet, always quoting poetry. He was very idealistic...just inspiring!” His efforts and recitations succeeded in helping gel the scattered group of busy elected officials into a stronger, more effective voice on issues pertaining to California Latinos. With organization and a working staff, they were now able to move forward and accomplish substantive tasks.

He understood how important networking and leadership development would be for the organization's vitality, strengths that have continued to set the Caucus apart as a nationally recognized model. Arriaga recalls him as "instrumental in developing interest to others and helping us build momentum within the organization at that time. He was a great networker, pulling people in as board members or to participate in our events." He even pushed fellow board members to make personalized invitations to Caucus events over the phone, while he himself made announcements at other events he attended. Whatever was necessary to build up the organization, he did it.



With the development of a solid infrastructure, the young president began to see the value the Caucus was having as a leadership experience tool for newly elected officials. In an address to membership published during his presidency, Torres foreshadows the organization's future impact. "One of the most important roles I see for the Caucus," he said, "is as a training ground for future leaders. I've seen tremendous growth in knowledge of governmental procedure by members...I believe that as a result of our efforts, we could realize ten to twelve new state legislators by the turn of the century."



# FOUNDING MEMBER

Like many founding members, Fernando Armenta joined the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus with a strong background in grassroots organizing and activism. He had been a key part of the historic federal voting rights lawsuit against the at-large elections of the City of Salinas in 1987. It was a case brought to court by the Mexican-American Legal Defense Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in an effort to ensure equal access to public leadership decisions for all Salinas residents, including...



# FERNANDO ARMENTA

the large Latino populations. Fernando Armenta, along with Simón Salinas and Marta Granados, served as plaintiffs in the federal trial. The case was settled before the trial ended, with the City of Salinas agreeing to move from an at-large system of electing city council members to district elections. “That’s when the first Mexican-American, Simón Salinas, got elected to the council in the history of that city. That’s when, in 1989, then in 1991, Anna Caballero and I came on,” he says. “Two years after that, another Latino was elected, so we had four out of seven votes.” That historic case also set the tone for other elections throughout Monterey County. Soon community college and high school districts were “voluntarily going to district elections,” recalls Armenta. “We broke down a lot of the major political barriers when we went from at-large to district elections.”

Prior to the redistricting case and to his term on the Salinas City Council, Armenta had served as an organizer for the Farm Workers Movement in San Diego’s Logan Heights, as a member of LULAC, and as President of the local chapter of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). “They noticed I was willing to be disciplined, responsive and [that] I was willing to walk the picket line almost every week...They saw my commitment,” he says of his volunteer service in the United Farm Workers Union. “Not everybody gets asked to serve. To me, it was a very high standard

a very honorable position to be asked.” Reflecting on what it has meant in the long run, he adds, “I think it was more of a self sacrifice that I had learned about, a lot of political empowerment of our people and how far would I be willing to sacrifice my personal values, my goals for the sake of somebody else’s benefit.”

After earning a Bachelors Degree in Social Welfare from San Diego State University in 1976, Fernando Armenta returned to Salinas and then graduated with a Masters Degree in Social Work from San José State University in 1979. While education was an important part of his preparation for office, he attributes much of his effectiveness as a leader to his early experience organizing on behalf of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos in his community. Thanks to that early training during the Farm Workers Movement, he says he was “not afraid of asking the hard questions, holding the city council, the city manager’s office responsible to be more responsive to the Mexican-American community.” To this day, he maintains the conviction that, “It was all about empowering politically our local community...it wasn’t just about getting elected to office, but making sure you were accountable to your community.”



While serving on the Salinas City Council, Fernando Armenta became involved on the Regional Transit Board of Directors, which serves eight of the twelve cities in Monterey County. At the time, he says, “there was not a single Latino on that seven-member board.” He has been chair of that same Board now for the last twelve years. Through his work on the Regional Transit Board and in a variety of public leadership positions, he continues to see that landmark district elections case for the City of Salinas as “a pretty massive wall to break down” in terms of equal access to decision-making opportunities. He continues on to explain that, “once in a while you feel like someone wants to put that wall back up. We may have our political or personal differences, but we realize we have a common purpose in terms of who we represent in the areas we live.”

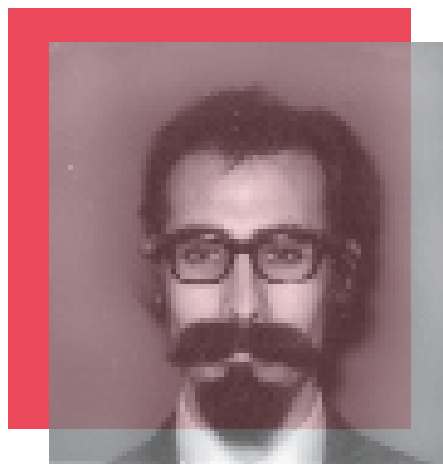
Currently, Fernando Armenta serves as District 1 Supervisor for Monterey County and has been a member of the California State Association of Counties for three years. He was one of the first to join the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus when it was just beginning. Over the years, Supervisor Armenta has come to see the Caucus as a place that offers “opportunities to network and compare

notes...you can share that in a very nonthreatening, informal, [and] respectful manner.” He has continued to be involved in the Caucus after all these years, not as a Board Member but in a role that supports regional Latino Caucus activities such as the Annual Summer Conference and various networking events. He sees the Caucus as “a very objective, very safe environment for council members and mayors to safely dialogue, interchange and hopefully learn something from each other.”

In terms of motivation, he firmly holds that “the most powerful one has been the Farm Worker Movement. Everything else seems to derive from that. But it [also comes from] being exposed to a variety of positive and negative challenges that I see and that many other people experience. You just build successes and you try to bring as many other people with you when there is a struggle...Month after month, year after year you become stronger. You’re not perfect, you’re not magic, but you learn to learn from others. Your strength not only comes from within; a lot of your strength comes from others and that is how you build your inner strength in politics.”



When John Márquez was asked to accept an appointment to serve as the first Latino on the Richmond City Council, he was elated. There was, however, one catch: “You have to shave your mustache.” In order to take the position, he was asked to shave under the assumption that “I would intimidate the voters with my mustache because the people weren’t used to having a Latino on the council, and then with the mustache—how stereotypical, right?” After an initial refusal and subsequent negotiations, he and the Council agreed upon a trim.



JOHN MÁRQUEZ

By the time he was appointed in 1985 to finish the term of a city councilmember who died two months after taking the seat in a special election, Márquez had grown accustomed to speaking out and acting on behalf of the Latino population in Contra Costa County, no matter how small the issue. Márquez's political career began when he and his family moved to Richmond so he could attend college, where he was one of very few Latinos at Contra Costa College. He questioned the administration's recruitment efforts in Latino communities and worked with them to educate residents about the educational opportunities and free admission offered by the College. As he remembers, "We set up appointments with different deans in the high schools. We went there during the lunch periods and talked to Chicanos about higher education, and many of them never knew about college, never knew that the education was free because their parents were just hardworking people and education was just not of much importance to them. You came of age, you got out of high school to start work and help your family. So we started bringing them." Those efforts succeeded in bringing in over 500 new students to campus, many of whom became the first in their families to graduate from college. In 1970, he worked jointly with fellow student activists and the College to establish La Raza Studies Department, thirteen new classes and hire a department chair. That department is still an active and integral part of Contra Costa College, and the process provided Márquez with experiences he would later draw upon as a public servant—namely, the effectiveness of working in collaboration. Prior to this, he served as a paratrooper in the Army Infantry and Military Police Corps, and earned the

American Expeditionary Service Medal before returning to work in a tungsten ore mill in Bishop, California. He then went on to earn his Associates Degree from Contra Costa College and his Bachelor of Arts Degree from San Francisco State University in 1971. He recalls that, "in those days—in the mid-70s, late 70s—there were very few of us Chicanos with degrees, so the Mexican-American community looked up to us for leadership to the point where they actually requested that I go to law school." But law school could not keep Márquez's attention; his passion was counseling and education. He eventually withdrew after two years of law at Hastings College and went to work for the City of Richmond, and later for the Department of Industrial Relations in San Francisco. Through night courses at Cal State Hayward and San Jose State University, he earned a California Community College Teaching credential for Spanish, Psychology, and Ethnic Studies. He later served as Chair of the Richmond Police Commission. By the time he was appointed to the Richmond City Council, Márquez was ready. Richmond was ready.

Councilmember Márquez became a member of the League of California Cities and quickly saw what had looked familiar to him on the Contra Costa College campus in the late 1960s: a lack of representation of Latinos in the area. In this case, though, the area was the entirety of California. He met other local elected officials who were sensing the same thing and questioning the League about it, so he began working with them. That work, however, was postponed when he lost a reelection campaign and had to wait to reconnect with the

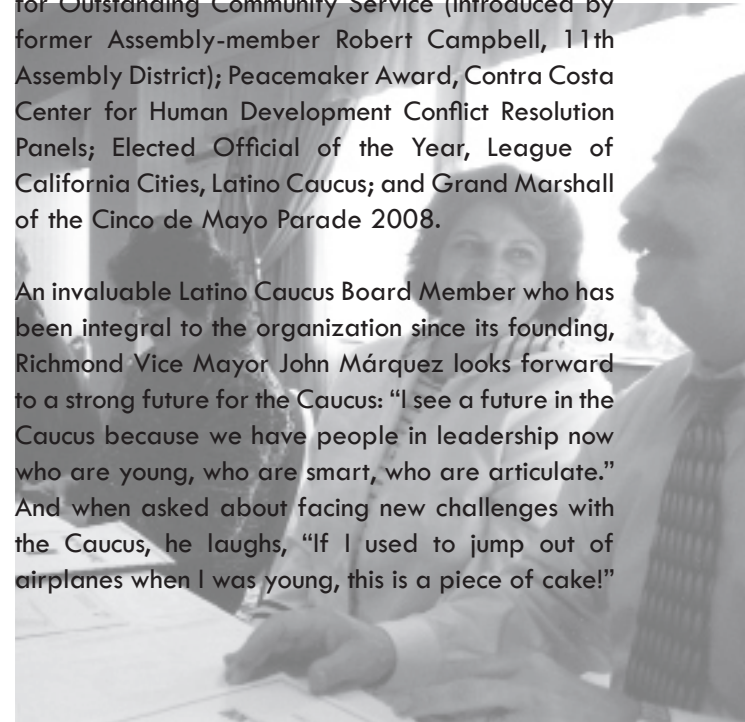
League until 1993 when he had again earned his place on the Council. The Latino Caucus by then had formed and John Arriaga was volunteering as Executive Director. “We had a lot of heart,” describes those early organizing efforts. “We were having difficulties in terms of our acceptability with the League...They saw us as a threat, as being separate, as being racist. We heard the whole gamut. We were really thinking about retiring from the League and going out and becoming our own separate organization.” Thankfully, he says, they didn’t and the group was able to work with the League of California Cities to gain official recognition as a Caucus and participate in the larger organizational platform.

While Márquez became very active with the Latino Caucus Board of Directors and with various League committees, he prefers to play a largely background role. Despite the opportunity, he has never even sought Caucus Presidency. Why? “I like to see the younger people get up there and shine,” he beams as he talks about the importance of grooming others for greater leadership capacities. For those with a history of being denied leadership opportunities, the case is often the same: “As Latinos, we’re brought up to be so respectful that sometimes we forget that we’re in charge...We have to remember that we have positions where we can make decisions.” In this way he has become the counselor he always wanted to become, interested in helping newly elected Latino officials realize their full potential as they assume local government responsibilities or ascend to prominent state and national leadership positions. He attests that he would “rather see young

people who have a future in politics get groomed to move into higher office.” That is why Márquez helped establish the Latino Caucus’ Peer Mentorship Program, which seeks to bridge the gap in experience, background and knowledge by pairing newly elected local elected officials with more seasoned veterans.

Seasoned he is. For more than four decades, John Márquez has been involved in “student and academic affairs, fiscal planning, contract negotiations, personnel labor relations, labor law enforcement, and developing partnerships with the public and private sector.” His many honors include: Contra Costa Hispanic of the Year; NAACP, Richmond Branch Award for Community Service; Contra Costa College Distinguished Alumni Award; California Association of Community Colleges Distinguished Alumni Award; Unity Church of Richmond Award for Community Service; California Assembly Resolution for Outstanding Community Service (Introduced by former Assembly-member Robert Campbell, 11th Assembly District); Peacemaker Award, Contra Costa Center for Human Development Conflict Resolution Panels; Elected Official of the Year, League of California Cities, Latino Caucus; and Grand Marshall of the Cinco de Mayo Parade 2008.

An invaluable Latino Caucus Board Member who has been integral to the organization since its founding, Richmond Vice Mayor John Márquez looks forward to a strong future for the Caucus: “I see a future in the Caucus because we have people in leadership now who are young, who are smart, who are articulate.” And when asked about facing new challenges with the Caucus, he laughs, “If I used to jump out of airplanes when I was young, this is a piece of cake!”





FIRST SPONSOR

One year before the Latino Caucus became an official part of the League of California Cities, Edward J. De La Rosa founded De La Rosa & Co. Investment Bankers. He had spent a total of six years running economic forecasting models for Fortune 500 companies on the East Coast and various investment projects for a blue chip firm in California. By that time he “had a loyal following of clients, an investor list, and knew from experience that the bank never pledged its capital to underwrite a bond financing.”



DE LA ROSA & CO.  
INVESTMENT BANKERS



It was then he questioned: “What did I need the bank for?” With that he decided to open his own firm and, like many entrepreneurs, recalls that, “during our first 18 months, I spent my life savings to keep De La Rosa & Co. running.” He developed the firm’s practice with California cities, redevelopment agencies, special districts and transportation authorities, later expanding activities to include the State of California and numerous public utilities.

Since its inception in 1989, the firm has grown into a full-service investment bank that specializes in helping public entities and private businesses secure funding for capital projects. Its focus is California: “We work every day with the state or transportation authorities or cities to meet the transportation, recreational, educational needs of the residents of this state. There seems to be no end to this kind of infrastructure. California is about 20% of the national market in terms of public finance.” In order to be prepared to identify and meet the needs of such a large market, De La Rosa & Company began attending League of California Cities conferences. The firm realized the League was a place “where staff members, city managers, city council members and board members get together to discuss the challenges faced in their jurisdictions and how they are going to meet those challenges—whether it be crime or clean water or transportation projects or health care.”



De La Rosa quickly saw the value of the League's newly formed Latino Caucus and became an early supporter, one whose confidence helped enable the nascent group to establish itself and pursue its ever-increasing objectives. In his view, it is "an organization composed of people that are involved everyday in the challenges at home, whether it's public safety or health care or infrastructure. They work hard and it's fun to be part of the organization." Today, De La Rosa & Company continues its commitment to California's municipal interests not only in their professional work, but also as a strong supporter of League and Latino Caucus activities and objectives.

Operating under the belief that good business leadership means good corporate citizenship, the firm supports a wide range of community organizations through the De La Rosa & Co. Charitable Foundation and has recently established the Fabric of Society scholarship for high school seniors. De La Rosa asserts that, "since we conduct business in California and are trying to help our clients improve the life of their constituents, helping not-for-profit organizations is another thing we can do. Most of the professionals who work here at some point in their lives have been the beneficiary of volunteer organizations or governmental organizations or public school systems. We become a stronger society when people help out those organizations when they can."



Pacific Gas and Electric Company salutes the League of California Cities  
Latino Caucus for making it a better place for Hispanic Americans



**PG&E Corporation.**

# FIRST CORPORATE PARTNER

Nearly fifteen years ago California's largest gas and electric utility took a chance and became the first corporate sponsor of a budding organization with a membership of only a handful of local elected officials. The company's willingness to make an investment in this collective vision enabled a group of passionate individuals to grow into a statewide organization representing over four hundred municipal leaders, eventually serving as a training ground for future state legislators and federal...



**PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC CO.**  
SILVIA ALDANA

appointees. Today, Pacific Gas & Electric Company's legacy continues as a strong supporter of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus. Indeed, it is the one company that has made the Latino Caucus—as we know it today—possible.

“It’s always challenging for organizations in start-up mode to get a company to believe in them, especially a major corporation,” says Silvia Aldana, who served as Pacific Gas & Electric Company’s Corporate Advisor to the Latino Caucus from 1996 to 2006. It was 1995 when the founding members of the Latino Caucus approached Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) for financial support to host meetings, organize conferences, forums and symposiums both independently and in conjunction with League of California Cities. What resulted was a win-win for all. Aldana recalls that, “at that time, the population in California was flourishing. Since we serve 48 of the 58 counties, our customer base was growing as well. We knew that we had a stake to play in helping the diversity of the communities be reflected in the civic arena.” They decided to make their stake an active one. Pacific Gas & Electric Company not only funded early Latino Caucus endeavors, but also pioneered its role as a liaison between the Caucus and California’s private sector by providing expertise in the form of panel participation, economic forecasts at annual Board Retreats, and legislative and regulatory briefings for the Caucus’ entire membership. PG&E calls this relationship with the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus a “perfect fit, giving us a line of communication where we can discuss relevant legislative and regulatory matters that occur in the industry and how they impact local jurisdictions.” In turn, Latino Caucus members benefit by hearing what issues face highly regulated sectors that have deep and ongoing ties to the cities they serve. Such insights strengthen relationships and enable leaders to carry out projects with greater ease and efficiency for their constituents.

The role Pacific Gas & Electric plays as Corporate Advisor to the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus also provides its members with a personal connection to a massive corporate entity, making it much easier for public and company officials to work together to get things done throughout California. As Silvia notes, “The key is that it established an open line of communication

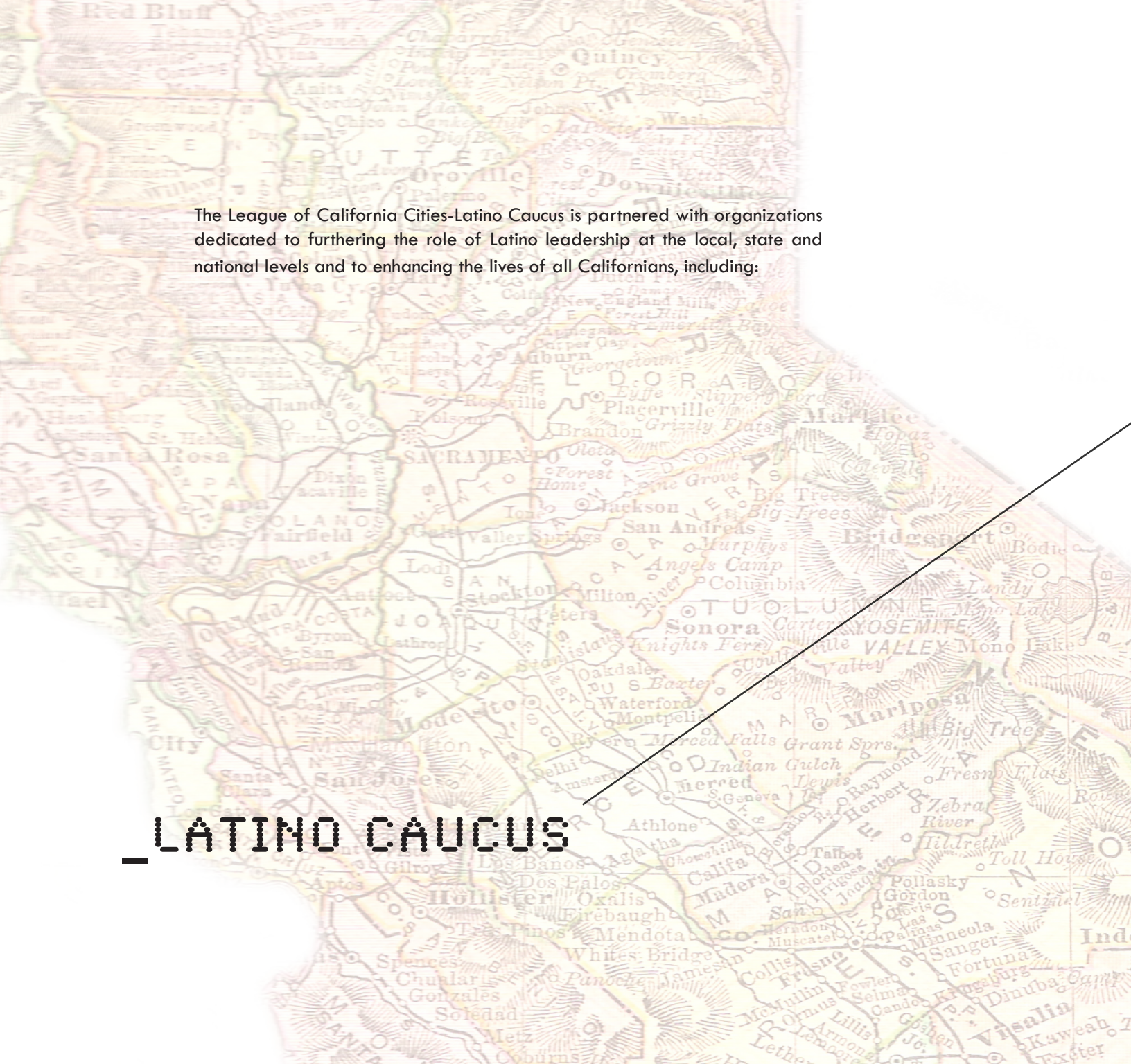
that did not exist before. We may not always agree on every single issue but the real value is that there is an open door policy on both ends.” Whether it be crafting effective legislation or collaborating with local governments on energy efficiency initiatives, Pacific Gas & Electric Company makes itself available to elected officials by providing invaluable expertise and taking the time to cultivate personal relationships with the cities it serves.

Most important, however, it is Pacific Gas & Electric’s commitment to the people of California. The company sentiment that “communities are strengthened only when they are represented by the diversity of the people who inhabit them” is exemplified by their continued investment in the Latino Caucus, an organization with a track record of helping local municipalities reach their full potential by training, supporting and advancing elected officials from historically underrepresented communities.

The Pacific Gas & Electric Company also demonstrates a strong commitment to leadership development among Latinos across the country by working closely with the National Association for Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), an organization that has partnered with the Latino Caucus since the late 1990s. In her work with both NALEO and the Latino Caucus, Aldana notes “the fact that Latinos are recognizing the significance of being civically engaged.” She sees a “cross-pollination among organizations” and finds witnessing “individuals that started out as local elected officials make their way through the political ranks—from local elected official to the State Legislature very rewarding. It really speaks to the value of the organizations and the work they are doing. It also speaks to the investment that the company is making.”

Recently elected to the board of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute in Washington DC, Silvia states that it is her hope and expectation that one day very soon, she will witness PG&E’s investment come full circle when one of the Latino Caucus members becomes a member of the U.S. Congress or the Senate.





The League of California Cities-Latino Caucus is partnered with organizations dedicated to furthering the role of Latino leadership at the local, state and national levels and to enhancing the lives of all Californians, including:

# LATINO CAUCUS





# PARTNERS

[Partial List]

Congressional Hispanic Caucus

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)

Hispanic Elected Local Officials (HELO)

California Legislative Latino Caucus

Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP)

California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

California Association for Local Economic Development

“When we come together in a collective body, we are able to share what we are doing in each of our cities and we take those policies across California...As we continue to create policies, we need to have people at the state level who are making smart decisions so that local government sees the value in them.”

—Nora Campos, Former Latino Caucus President & Founder of The Latino Summit





CHANGE HERE



“There was nobody to give us the roadmap to do it. We just did it ourselves, trying to figure out the avenues.”

—Maria Alegria, Past President of the Latino Caucus  
& First Latina President of the League of California Cities



It was a time when the full implications of NAFTA were becoming clear, when controversy over Proposition 187 had called attention to

immigration debates and when California's Latino population was becoming even more economically and culturally diverse. A decade of speculation about an emerging Latino middle class was becoming reality and California's private sector saw a boom in minority-owned businesses.

The state's Latino population was also gaining greater representation and voting power. Each month in 1996, an average of 18,000 Latinos turned eighteen and 30,000 immigrants became citizens, mostly Latinos. Simultaneously, term limits were making local offices a "spawning ground for people who have the ability to move into higher offices," as then-Assembly Member Louis Caldera told our staff in 1996. "There's no political machine that can control this," he added. "Our people believe in serving, including districts where Latinos are not the majority." From this diverse political landscape emerged Latino leaders who would not only contribute to the shaping of their local communities, but to California as a whole.

"The Caucus will be about progressive, effective, and relevant change that moves and improves life for all people."

—Latino Caucus 1996 Board Retreat Newsletter Feature

In 1995, the Latino Caucus was beginning another phase of rapid growth. With President Sam Torres at the helm, the Board of Directors organized its first Executive Committee, which included Regional Representatives from Northern, Central and Southern California. At the same time, they appointed John E. Arriaga as Executive Director after he had served informally for over four years.

The Latino Caucus also forged a closer working relationship with the League of California Cities to further mutual strategic objectives as advocates for local municipalities and California's diverse communities. In the process, the Latino Caucus gained a clearer and more articulate voice within the League, with many of its members becoming integral leaders on the League Board of Directors and within its vast grassroots network. Caucus members also branched out in regional advocacy efforts, such as the Small Cities Consortium (SCC), which was founded in 1995 and chaired by Parlier Mayor and Latino Caucus Board Member Luis Patlán.

“There have been a number of effective ways of encouraging people. You may not be on the Board of Directors, you may not be on a policy committee, but there are all sorts of groups that you may feel more comfortable and relate to that would allow you to feel at home in these meetings...The Latino Caucus is by far the most effective, no doubt about it!”

“League priorities were developed mostly through policy committees and when I first became Executive Director, we didn't have policy committees so we created standing policy committees that gave us an ongoing policy direction. The Latino Caucus was very active in making sure they had members in the committees and those were appointed by the President of the League...I don't remember a conflict with positions between the Latino Caucus and the League.”

“[The Latino Caucus] has had a very strong focus on the importance of local government...Prior to 1990, there was no way for a group of city officials to make their voice known, so it would be known through the League. But the League was such a big organization that you couldn't really identify who you would be helping, other than your local mayor. So to have a group of city officials that would be saying the same thing, really, as the larger, more uncontrolled organization was saying was really, really effective and has been for a long time.”

—Don Benninghoven,  
Former League Executive Director





# a SHIFT

When John Russo took the helm of the League of California Cities as President, he noticed some discrepancies in the representation. “Part of my concern upon becoming an officer of the League Board,” he explains, “was that the Board did not in any way reflect the diversity in elected officials in California, let alone the population in California.” After discussions with Board Members, League staff and Caucus leaders, Russo found that the best way to bring greater diversity to the League’s representation was to expand the Board “by adding eight new at-large seats.” He continues to explain that, “for the one time while I was President, the President was able to name the eight at-larges rather than go through the nominating committee.” President Russo elected two Latino officials, two Asian-American officials, two African-American officials and two European-American officials and “mixed [them] into the rest of the Board. That was controversial...but it did jumpstart things.”

By integrating new leadership and ideas, the League underwent a fundamental shift. “It really dramatically changed the organization which up to then was [comprised of] good people, really public spirited, open-minded people, but the same people.” Beyond adding new blood, the change allowed for dialogues among municipal leaders that included the viewpoints from historically underrepresented communities. Now their voices and concerns could be heard at the beginning of the League’s decision-making process, rather than in field studies years later about the impacts of policy.

Russo’s Presidency was also a major step toward greater integration of the Latino Caucus into the overarching structure of the League. His appointment of the new Board Members, two of whom were members of the Latino Caucus, eventually led to the League of California Cities electing its first ever Latino President. Then-Los Angeles City Council President, now California State Senator, Alex Padilla led the League from 2004-2005. He had been a member of the Latino Caucus since 2002, since his election to city council.



Past League Presidents Alex Padilla & Maria Alegria

Next to break open the historic barriers of the League was then-Mayor Maria Alegria of Pinole, who had also been a long time Latino Caucus Board Member. She served as the first Latina to be President of the League of California Cities in its entire history. Russo gives “a lot of the credit” for the greater representation of Latinos and other minorities in the League’s leadership “to Chris McKenzie,

the [League’s] Executive Director, and John Arriaga because John was always there.” He claims that, “with the Latino Caucus, we didn’t need to do anything because we had John Arriaga. We just needed to get seats [on the Board]...The Latino Caucus was the paradigm. We wanted to see other caucuses be as strong and as well put together as the Latino Caucus.”

Coming from Oakland, John Russo was well aware of California’s social realities. As League President from 2002 to 2003, he saw the changes taking place across the state and the imminent need for greater inclusion and opportunity for all leaders: “There are people who think caucuses are divisive and racist on the natural, not on the pejorative term. I understand that. You know, maybe 25 years from now I might feel the same way, but we are not done yet in terms of diversification. My view of these difficult social issues is a very pragmatic one, which is [that] I am not interested personally in a color blind society, but I am interested in a society where race does not determine opportunity, where people are allowed to be individuals.” He asserts that, “in the meantime, understanding how social networking works, you cannot deny that the consequences of a very racially conscious society are that social networks develop to some extent with race as a factor, maybe not as the only factor. As long as it’s a factor, we need to be mindful of it and deal with it in a pragmatic way that leads us to a place we want to be, where from an opportunity perspective and an access perspective, that really does become irrelevant...When you get to something of an organization like the Latino Caucus is at this particular junction in American social history, it is an important factor in continuing the evolution from a color-obsessed society to a color neutral society.”



It is the consensus among Latino Caucus leaders that Chris McKenzie coming in as Executive Director of the League of California Cities in 1999 marked a major turning point for the League-Caucus relationship. McKenzie was made aware of the Caucus when then-Latino Caucus President Oscar Ríos, who was part of the interviewing committee, asked McKenzie his opinion of the Caucus. Once hired, Executive Director McKenzie found that the Caucus was in fact “a very important part of the League.”

CHRIS MCKENZIE

“I saw very early that many of the future leaders of our organization were going to come out of the Caucus,” says McKenzie. “So I thought it was very important that the Caucus itself work very closely with every aspect of the organization and be recognized as an incubator of future leaders.” He felt the responsibility of strengthening the place of the Caucus within the League and “encouraged the Caucus to grow and play a leadership role in our program. It always brings quality programming to the League...I have understood and been supportive of the fact that it is a part of our organization where Latino appointed and elected officials may have some of their early experiences where they can assess their leadership opportunities in the organization and get support for playing that role in the organization.”

Working closely with the League’s Board of Directors and the Latino Caucus Board and Executive Director John E. Arriaga, McKenzie was successful in closing the gap that had historically existed between the two entities. Since its inception, the Latino Caucus had been petitioning the League of California Cities for official status as a Caucus. The group wanted to work within the larger structure of the League. Due to resistance, however, they had even considered separating in order to be able to establish the organization they felt was so needed in California at the time. When Oscar Ríos speaks of

the subsequent shift in the League’s reception of the Caucus he says, “I give credit to McKenzie because he is the one who really felt that we needed to have this organization...he opens the doors more.” McKenzie asserts that, “from my perspective as Executive Director of the whole League, one of my major goals is to make sure that we focus as an organization on the things that unite us, recognizing that people come from different walks of life, that every city is different, that even members of the Latino Caucus come from cities that are drastically different, but they are united by this common bond of being in service of the citizens of their communities.”

When reflecting on the Latino Caucus today, McKenzie finds it has been “a great supporter of our strategic objectives. The people who are involved in the Caucus many times are the same people who are working in our divisions or working on our Board, or working not even in those capacities but just helping us to accomplish our strategic priorities.” Indeed, today the Caucus has grown into a very integral position within the larger League structure and offers League members, Latino or not, an array of vital resources. “The League has been enriched by the leadership that has been developed by the Latino Caucus,” explains McKenzie, “and this hand-and-glove relationship we have in advancing our core priorities.”



“Chris turned around, looked at California, looked at the demographics and said, ‘Okay, I’ve got to make some connections and make them quickly.’ He’s a political realist. He came in with a fresh view and was able to make some quick decisions in terms of the political reality.”

Dave Mora,  
Past Salinas City Manager & Early Caucus Advisor

There have been numerous changes that have dramatically affected leadership in California over the last decades, such as term limits in the California State Legislature. McKenzie sees that “term limits have led to tremendous growth within the Legislature itself.” He cites Assembly Member Anna Caballero, who was slated to become Second Vice President of the League of California Cities after a long career of service, as an example when he explains that, “as opportunities arise in the Legislature sooner than they otherwise would, people who are seeking leadership opportunities will move up and out faster and they may not have a chance to serve.” The Latino Caucus itself has changed and been changing California as a result of such restructuring, which has given rise to greater diversity among elected leaders. “I detect much more openness on issues today than I did nine or ten years ago, and I think that’s just going to grow over time as there is further involvement of Latino elected city officials in the leadership in the statewide organization,” explains the League’s Executive Director. He sees this process as simply “natural that people would begin to understand what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes when they spend a lot of time with them, or they hear the stories about what is going on in their city and the challenges they face.”

As part of his ongoing work cultivating a more fluid relationship between the League of California Cities and its Latino Caucus, Executive Director McKenzie has helped to open the doors for the first Latino and Latina Presidents in the League’s entire history. “The Caucus has become this wonderful incubator of leadership for the organization,” he beams. “I hope it continues to do that because we want the best and the brightest, the most inspiring leaders to lead our organization. And in time those are going to come from the ranks of Latino elected officials, so we want to see them develop in the organization, feel comfortable in the organization, understand and seek out opportunities for leadership and be supported in that capacity when they do it.”

Executive Director McKenzie is eager about what he sees as a bright future for the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus. In his view, the Caucus is “the premier organization of its type in the country. It’s been steady and growing over the years because people have nurtured it, and celebrated it and have worked hard and had great staff. California has been enriched by it as well. Part of the organization that started off with a lot of people wondering, What is this thing? Why do we have it? Is it a threat somehow?, most of those questions have been resolved. It is like most of those things that start off as controversy; it has become pretty mainstream and part of the organization.”

# THE LEAGUE

The stories of the Latino Caucus' founding are rife with struggle for official recognition as part of the League of California Cities. Over the years, however, the two groups have come to recognize their mutual benefit to one another and to all Californians.

“I saw very early that many of the future leaders of our organization were going to come out of the Latino Caucus, so I thought it was very important that the Caucus itself work very closely with every aspect of the League and be recognized as an incubator of future leaders.”

“I have never once felt like there was any difference in the agenda of a Latino elected official working in our Caucus than a non-Latino official outside the Caucus. Everybody has the same goal in terms of building strong local government and strong city government, and safe and strong communities. So for me, it's about building a strong relationship core and working together on our common agenda.”

—Chris McKenzie,

League of California Cities Executive Director

“The Caucus now is a resource to the League and the leadership that you develop in the League of California Cities through the Latino Caucus is very effective when it becomes part of the League structure.”

—Rosario Marin,

Former United States Treasurer  
& Latino Caucus Board Member

“[Our success] is also our League, our mother organization. There is no other organization like the League in California. One of the things that I was most proud of when I was President of the League Board was this whole grassroots network that we had created. The Caucus is just part of that whole grassroots network...We understand there is a different perspective of cultural and language issues that are part of our state. We’re really stronger when we work together to solve these issues.”

—Maria Alegria, First Latina  
President of the League of California Cities

“It is a platform of issues that reflect the entirety of California, so it doesn’t tend to stray too much from the League of California Cities’ agenda. What the Latino Caucus brings is the unique perspective of either Latino elected officials or the Latino communities that we represent, or a combination of both.”

—Alex Padilla,  
California State Senator &  
Past Latino Caucus President

“I think it is important that anybody on the [League] Board know why the caucuses exist, know that they are there and see that they can be used to mutual advantages for both parties—for the both the caucuses and the organization.”

“I want [the caucuses] to be more involved with things that are going on in and around the League...We should be able to take advantage of their collective wisdom and their connections to the Legislature in both Sacramento and Washington, DC. Frankly, I think that that belies where the League needs to strengthen.”

“At the end of the day for the League, it’s about getting our priorities and our strategic goals enacted by the Legislature. What is important for us is to make sure those things are implemented...and if the Latino Caucus can help, I want to employ them to do that. That’s where the caucuses can be such a huge help to the League. And vice versa.”

—Jim Madaffer,  
Immediate Past President, League of California Cities

# THE CAUCUS



# ASSEMBLY MEMBER

When Assembly Member Anna Caballero assumed the responsibility of representing California's 28th Assembly District, she came with an extensive leadership background both at the local and state level. She had served on the Salinas City Council as Councilmember and Mayor, was the second incoming President of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus and was even slated to take helm as the next President of the entire League of California Cities. She would have been the third Latino ever to fill that role.



# ANNA CABALLERO

Before term limits in California, such a background in local government would have been highly unconventional for someone joining the State Legislature, but Assembly Member Caballero's story exemplifies a new breed of representation at our State Capitol since 1996. And the Latino Caucus is among the premier training grounds for such statewide leadership.

Assembly Member Caballero's career in public service did not begin in office, but in the courtroom and the fields. The child of copper miners, she earned her undergraduate degree from the University of California, San Diego and her law degree from the University of California, Los Angeles. She moved to Salinas to work with California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), "specifically wanting to work with working families and farm workers." When CRLA's funding was cut, she had to move on and founded a private law firm in 1982 to provide affordable legal services. She later earned the Athena Award for entrepreneurial excellence.

It was not, however, legal work that sparked her interest in public service: "Once I got to Salinas, I fell in love with it and bought a house in East Salinas, which is where the Latino community lives. I started getting involved in neighborhood activities, having events where we ended up getting to know each other. Questions came up about why a street didn't have a sidewalk or why the sidewalk ended where it ended, so I started getting involved in asking questions." She and her husband were starting a family and these everyday civic concerns prompted her to become

more active in matters that would impact their future in Salinas, so she joined the newly formed Democratic Club. Eventually, she was asked to put her name in for Planning Commissioner. She won the appointment and took her place on a commission that previously had no representation from the North or East areas of the city where large numbers of minority families were concentrated.

For five years, Assembly Member Caballero spoke up for the needs of her area in city planning matters. Then Salinas went to district elections, opening up the opportunity for underrepresented communities to have a voice in city governance. Because she had experience with city planning, she was approached by members of her neighborhood association who wanted her to run for city council. She agreed. It was a new challenge for her. Having moved her family to a larger home in a new neighborhood, the Assemblywoman had to rally a more diverse community behind her in order to earn a seat on the council. She would have to bridge the communication gap between Salina's Latino and European-American communities, going out and talking to constituents who had never voted for a Latino candidate and who, she says, "didn't know me, [who] weren't necessarily going to trust me. I needed to go and talk to them about the issues." Talk she did. Assembly Member Caballero walked door-to-door throughout the district, telling residents about her platform, asking if she could count on their votes. The result, she recalls, was less than desired: "I walked for five months and only got 30% or 25% of the votes of the people I was talking to, which was depressing."

But at a time when “there was a lot of racial tension in the community,” securing 25% of new voters might well have been a successful start. Thankfully for her, voters in other parts of her district turned out to the polls and carried her to the council.

In 1991, the newly elected official—and first Latina to ever serve on the Salinas City Council—was encouraged by her City Manager, Dave Mora, to join the League of California Cities. Mora had been a long time advocate of the statewide opportunities the League allowed city officials, especially those from rural cities like Salinas. But Caballero’s initial experiences with the League left her feeling disconnected, “You’d walk into the conventions and there would be 5,000 people or so...Back then, it was mostly men, so a short Latina was absolutely invisible.” She persisted in attending and finally connected with other elected officials from the Central Valley, most of whom were Latinos. When they decided to come together and form the Latino Caucus, she admits “it provided an opportunity for me to be able to walk into a room of 60 people in a session and know one person there that I could go over and have a conversation with...I lost my anonymity.”

Assembly Member Caballero was there when the Latino Caucus, which was not yet a sanctioned part of the League of California Cities, was petitioning for official caucus status. In fact, she was at the forefront of the debate and remembers “insisting that the League start understanding the role of Latinos as elected officials, [and] also as a population to be dealt with in the state.” Hers was an articulate voice able to reach

across the table to fellow League members to explain the reasons a Latino Caucus would be beneficial to the organization’s statewide grassroots efforts. Soon after they gained inclusion within the League structure, the Assemblywoman, who was then Mayor of Salinas, became the Latino Caucus’ third President.

At the League level, Assemblywoman Caballero chaired the newly formed Housing Opportunity Task Force, which “put together legislations that would allow cities to get out of the regulatory process” if had build adequate workforce housing. The Task Force was created to address the affordable housing crisis that was plaguing lower income communities. Caballero describes that most local Latino elected officials “were building a lot of affordable housing in our communities, but it cost us economically. You represent a blue-collar community, you build more affordable housing and you have less resources. So you dig yourself a hole. Yet we are surrounded by non-diverse communities that are wealthier, that don’t build affordable housing but have an economic base. They create the workforce need but they don’t house it, so then they get wealthier and we get poorer.” In the end, the legislation failed to pass. Their efforts, however, did help to bring about a more incentive-based shift in statewide policymaking that has served to break down this entrenched cycle. It is an issue she continues to work on in the State Assembly.

Assemblywoman Caballero served as Mayor of Salinas since 1998 and was Executive Director of Partners for Peace, a non-profit organization that focuses on early childhood development, literacy and family services.





# FOUNDING MEMBER

One of the few founding members to become President of the Latino Caucus, Victor Lopez, Mayor of the City of Orange Cove, was elected to the post in 1998. He had been among the first local elected Latino officials—including Mayor Ruben Garcia of Bell Gardens, Councilmember Nell Soto of Pomona and his fellow Orange Cove City Councilmember Roy Rodriguez—to meet unofficially at League of California Cities' events, focusing their energies on issues concerning Latinos.



# VICTOR LOPEZ

“We were talking about doing the Latino Caucus,” he says, “because there were issues related to the Hispanic community that we wanted to bring forward.”

Victor Lopez was elected Mayor of the City of Orange Cove in 1978 and joined the League as a regular member shortly thereafter. At the time, he recalls only a handful of other Latino officials and a lack of attention paid to the needs of the state’s growing Latino populations. The small group concerned itself with a variety of issues facing their communities. Lopez himself was among the first Latino members of the League to serve as a guest speaker; the issue was affordable housing, which remains pertinent to Latino leaders today. The budding Latino Caucus took action on other issues as well, ranging from health care to crime prevention. “I believe those are issues of concern to everybody in California and the nation,” asserts Lopez. “When we talk as a Latino Caucus, we talk for every human being. It’s not the Latino Community; we have a voice for every human being, whether it’s [about] child care, Head Start [programs], health care, housing, gang prevention, recreation—we deal with that level and make sure their voices are being heard.”

After many informal meetings, in groups from three to a full crowd, these members of the League of California Cities began their petition for official inclusion as a Latino Caucus. What they were met with initially was

resistance. As Mayor Lopez recalls, “I remember the director walking into our meeting. The place was full and we were saying, ‘We need to form a Caucus’... We let everybody know and everybody came to the meeting.” Yet by all accounts, the group was viewed as too radical for the League. While many of its members had worked with Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers Union or had become politicized during the Chicano civil rights movement, Lopez’s response to the charge echoed the overall group consensus: “Radical? Police protection, education, Head Start, child care—definitely law and order.”

The League, according to then-Executive Director Don Benninghoven, took a supportive role of the group as it functioned independently. Pointing to the Elected Women’s Group as the model of a highly structured independent organization, Benninghoven noted that, “the Latino Caucus looked at that, saw how successful they were. It was a parallel organization in that sense. It was very helpful for both of them.” When it came time to petition for official inclusion in the League, however, support fell short. While having first been approached in 1972 by a group of “about twenty Hispanic representatives there to talk to me about their role in the League” before taking office, Benninghoven recalls recognizing the Caucus only in the “late ‘70s, early ‘80s.” The former Director remembers that the group “would

meet when there was an officer...They never had a staff; it was a very informal relationship.”

Since his election as Mayor, Victor Lopez was active in the League of California Cities and with this initial group of leaders who pioneered the way toward official recognition of the Latino Caucus. It was then, he claims, “we were able to take [issues] forward, present them and action was taken...We were the voice and we have always been the voice.” Looking back, Lopez has utmost “respect [for] all the leaders. I honor them for taking the stand that we took at that time. It was not easy to take a stand like that. They called it radical. Anything that is change is radical if that is your definition. I think it’s good, it’s healthy.”

Mayor Lopez himself carries an impressive record of development in the City of Orange Cove. A rural Central Valley community nestled at the western base of the Sierra Nevadas, Orange Cove is home to a population made up almost entirely of farm working families. Once a farm worker himself and armed only with a high school diploma, Lopez decided to run for office because he wanted to ensure the wellbeing of children. Working in the fields, he recalls “the children were either in extreme heat or freezing temperatures, not eating properly, no nutrition. It was awful. I decided I wanted to build a childcare center,” he explains. “There’s got to be a better tomorrow for the farm worker. There’s got to be some respect.”

In 1996, Mayor Lopez brought in a \$827,000 grant from the California Department of Education for a day care center serving 150 children. Orange Cove’s business community contributed and additional \$600,000 and the Department of Nutrition agreed to contribute \$200,000 annually. He successfully advocated for federal grants and loans to build low-income family homes. “We believed in it, the city council believed in it—that’s what made it happen,” Lopez boasted in a 1997 Latino Caucus’ newsletter feature. Among other developments are an Economic Development Center, the city’s first high school and a brand new skate park. To date, Lopez’s administration has put \$60 million in state grants toward the development of Orange Cove, a city once considered the poorest in California.

During a long career in politics that began with hand-printed silkscreen campaign signs, Lopez’s political experience has run the gamut. He has been elected as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention four times and, while fasting “to call attention to farm worker in justices in the Central Valley,” he recalls that “Cesar put the cross on me,” a gesture the union leader made when someone was near death due to fasting. Today, Victor Lopez continues to serve as Mayor of Orange Cove while also chairing Fresno’s Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). In a moment of reflection, the Mayor put a question to himself and fellow Latino leaders: “I’ve always wondered, Do we really know how much authority we have?”



# PAST PRESIDENT

When she went to ask her tenth grade career counselor how to prepare for college, Maria Alegria found a response that would challenge her, one that would change her life forever: Oh dear, your kind doesn't go to college...you should think about trying to get a husband or taking home economics. Too driven to be dissuaded, Alegria became active. She organized other students and convinced her history teacher to teach a Chicano History class in an effort to make other students aware...



# MARIA ALEGRIA

and proud of their cultural heritage, of the Civil Rights Movement and of their individual and collective potential. She refused to see any more of “her kind” deterred by racism. Before she graduated high school, Maria Alegria had recognized herself as a leader. The University of California at Berkeley recognized her, too, and she obtained her hard-earned degree there after first attending Contra Costa Community College and the University of California at San Diego.

Self-described as “enthusiastic” and “starry-eyed” after winning her election, Maria Alegria had become the first Latina/o to be elected to the Pinole City Council in 1992. And if being a newly elected city council member, working part time and being mother of four small children was not enough, Alegria immediately joined the League of California Cities and soon became one of the first Board Members of the Latino Caucus: “We were all excited. You don’t wait around for opportunity to knock on the door, it’s there and you seize the

moment.” She recalls that, “at first it was just making the connections, networking and really having a social network. Then realizing that it could be more than just a social network. We are leaders and

we are reshaping our communities. Even though I don’t have a large constituency of Latino voters in my community, there are issues—Latino issues—that are still California’s issues.”



She and other Latino Caucus members became pioneers within the League of California Cities, creating alliances and opening up doors for greater participation. She was instrumental in efforts to neutralize the

League’s position on the controversial Proposition 187, a major development for the Latino Caucus.

Ms. Alegria eventually came to serve on both the League’s and Latino Caucus’ Boards of Directors, serving two full terms as Latino Caucus President from 2000-2002. Under President Alegria’s

leadership, the Caucus developed relationships with California's private sector and garnered even greater membership participation. Understanding the opportunities for leadership that California's then recent redistricting process had, she focused on the Peer Match Program for educating newly elected officials and spearheaded the Caucus' partnership with the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) and the Local Government Commission on several innovative projects.

Continuing on to serve four terms as Mayor of Pinole, Maria Alegria admits that being a public servant is "not glamorous." She contends that, "being an effective leader is listening and being able to get the job done." Indeed, her skills and commitment were tested when, in 2006, she took the helm as the first Latina President of the entire League of California Cities.

Ms. Alegria currently serves as Executive Director for Contra Costa Faith Works!, a collaborative of organized labor and interfaith organizations in Contra Costa County advocating for public policy solutions that promote social, economic and environmental justice for its residents.

She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2005 Contra Costa College Women's History Celebration Award for Social Justice, the 2003 Community College League of California Distinguished Alumna Award, the 1993 Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) Community Service Award, the 1993 Excellence in Hispanic Leadership Award from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Contra Costa County, and the 1994 Faith and Justice Award from Catholic Charities of the East Bay, Diocese of Oakland.







# PAST BOARD MEMBER

“I never thought that I was going to be in public service,” is the way Rosario Marin begins to describe her political career. “I started out in banking. I saw my future in banking. The birth of my first child, Eric, is [what] really compelled me to this. He just turned 23...and in 23 years I’ve done things that I’ve never thought possible—everything from working to change the laws for people with disabilities to become a Council [Member] and Mayor to Treasurer of the United States, the first



# ROSARIO MARIN

to ever run in California for the U.S. Senate and now the first Latina to head the State and Consumer Services Agency, as well as the only Latina in the Governor's Cabinet." Indeed, her career is one of firsts in nearly every level of government, not to mention authorship of a recent book.

An immigrant from Mexico arriving in the United States at a young age, Marin has maintained a commitment to the particular struggles facing Latinos. She first became part of the League of California Cities & Latino Caucus when she was elected to the Huntington Park City Council. She quickly assumed leadership roles as President of the League's Mayors and Council Members Department and member of the Fiscal, Public Safety and Planning Committees. She also served on the Latino Caucus Board of Directors, finally being elected Vice President. She describes her work at times as being a kind of "ambassador" between the Latino Caucus and the greater League structure. "Through the Mayors and City Councils Department, I was able to understand the purpose of the Latino Caucus and clearly I would bring in that perspective when I was President."

When she first joined the League as a new Council Member, Marin quickly found camaraderie in the Latino Caucus. The group "offered the opportunity to talk to other Latino elected officials and," she said, "I found that there was [a] willingness to help. Of course I was the new kid on the block, so whoever was there had more experience. It was really nice. It was a coming together with similar challenges across the different cities throughout the state."

More than that, it was "a training ground" where as a newly elected city council member, Marin refined her skills and built the foundation for an illustrious career. "More and more elected officials are becoming Assembly Members and Senators. They're becoming the next round of leaders," she notes. "Let me just put it this way: it wouldn't surprise me if the first Latino governor was somebody who was a member of the [League of California-Cities] Latino Caucus."

Marin also remembers a time when the Latino Caucus was still struggling to become a recognized part of the League of California Cities: "What was exciting about it was that it was growing...there wasn't a lot of support from the structure at that time in the League of California Cities to support the creation of the Latino Caucus. We felt that we needed to create the Latino Caucus with the sentiment that the Latino Caucus could not be dependent upon whether the League itself was supporting it or not, but that we were strong enough to start the Caucus." She continues on to explain that, "the Caucus now is a resource to the League and the leadership that you develop in the League of California Cities through the Latino Caucus is very effective when it becomes part of the League structure."

Efforts to become an integral part of the League succeeded, of course, as did Rosario Marin's own career. In the summer of 1996, the Latino Caucus newsletter reported that Marin was gaining notice

at the Republican National Convention. In 1997, she was appointed by then-Governor Pete Wilson as Deputy Director of the Governor's Office of Community Relations. From there her career continued to flourish, allowing her opportunities to serve at even greater levels of government, and eventually as the first Mexican-born Treasurer of the United States of America.

During her tenure as Treasurer, Rosario Marin stood behind the U.S. Treasury's financial literacy outreach program, focussing specifically on remittances. Her own family had relied upon remittances when her father found work in the United States. "I was intimately familiar with the lifeblood that remittances are to those families in Mexico, and I became aware that in some instances people sending their \$200-\$300 per month [remittance] were being charged up to 20%. I said, 'This is unacceptable. This is legally criminal. How is it that people who work the hardest, earn the least pay the most for a very simple transaction?' I, who am Treasurer of the United States, who has a bank account, who knows about banking, would NEVER pay 20% for sending that little amount of money to Mexico. So I worked very hard with Mexico, with banks, certainly with the Treasury and we brought a lot of light to this issue...By facilitating that competition, magic happened. Today, if you have a particular account with a particular bank, sending money to Mexico is absolutely free. If I do nothing more with my life, I will be very happy that I did that."

Rosario Marin has not stopped there; she continues to do even more with her life. In addition to her work in the U.S. Treasury, Marin became part of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. Crediting ex-President George W. Bush with prioritizing the education of Latinos, Marin says she and other leaders were given the opportunity to work with the Department of Education to strengthen federal support for Hispanic students.

Marin later went on to serve as Chairwoman of the California Integrated Waste Management Board from 2004 to 2006; member of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Border 2012 Program; and was appointed to the Good Neighbor Environmental Board by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Marin also served as Secretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency in Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Cabinet.

She has worked throughout her career to represent the needs of the disadvantaged. In 1995, she became the second person ever to receive the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Prize at the United Nations for her advocacy on behalf of people with developmental disabilities. A graduate from the Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Marin was awarded an honorary Doctor of Law Degree from California State University, Los Angeles in 2002.



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# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT\_

“One of the most important roles I see for the Caucus is as a training ground for future leaders. I’ve seen tremendous growth in knowledge of governmental procedure by members...I believe that as a result of our efforts we could realize ten to twelve new state legislators by the turn of the century.”

—Sam Torres,  
Former Caucus President in a 1995 Newsletter Feature

“The opportunities that we have were created by the people who came before us, people who opened the doors. An essential ingredient of leadership is making sure that you’re creating a leadership cadre to take your place. This is especially true under term limits and in communities that haven’t always had the opportunities that come with representation, and only now have begun to emerge as a potent political force, as is the case with the Latino Community.”

“The Latino agenda is an American agenda; it’s the agenda of opportunity, it’s an agenda for investment in the future, for a safety net and for investing in working families. I’m excited about the prospects for the future.”

—Then-Assembly Majority Leader Antonio Villaraigosa,  
1997 Latino Caucus Legislative Spotlight Interview

“It’s a training ground. Let me put it this way: it would not surprise me if the first Latino governor was somebody who was a member of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus.”

—Rosario Marin, Former United States  
Treasurer & Past Latino Caucus Board Member



is key to the ongoing work of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus. The Latino Caucus provides members with opportunities for growth in educational and leadership roles through a series of focused events and activities. The Caucus works with local elected officials and a myriad of national, statewide and community-based organizations in developing youth-oriented and young adult programs in preparing the next generation of California Latino leaders.



# SENATOR

He might just be living proof that civic participation of Latinos is starting earlier and earlier, that the efforts of Latino Caucus founders and activists from all around California are being taken up by young Latinos eager to participate. At age 26, Alex Padilla led a successful campaign for Los Angeles City Councilmember, becoming the first Latino and youngest person to fill the position. He had previously worked in the offices of United States Senator Dianne Feinstein and...



# ALEX PADILLA

then-Assembly Member Tony Cárdenas, and says he was excited for the “opportunity to serve the community I was from in everything from public safety to basic city services.”

In his seven and a half years of service, Padilla led as Council President for four and a half years and, in 2001, as Acting Mayor of the nation’s second largest city during the September 11th crisis. During his time on the Council, he joined up with the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus and quickly became involved as a Board Member. The Caucus by that time had undergone significant organizational growth and was achieving a stronger presence inside the League of California Cities, among members of the California State Legislative Latino Caucus and with the private sector. For Padilla, “it was a great network” that allowed him “to work with folks at the League of [California] Cities and tap their experiences with cities throughout the State.” He seized opportunities, learned from others and from his own experiences, and eventually was elected to serve as Latino Caucus President.

As President, Alex Padilla took it upon himself to shine light on the growing obesity and diabetes epidemics facing Latinos. He worked with others in the Caucus and the League to educate all local elected officials throughout the State—not just Latinos—about changes they could make at the municipal level that would better enable Latinos and low-income families to achieve optimal health.

Then-President Padilla also recognized the need for the Latino Caucus to reach beyond the usual League of California Cities events. With the help of the Board, he initiated Regional Networking Events throughout California for Latino leaders who might otherwise not have the opportunity to attend League or Caucus events. As he sees it, “there are a lot of Latino local elected officials who cannot necessarily afford the League of [California] Cities’ dues or the conference fees. So instead of trying to push the local elected officials to the League of [California] Cities’ events, we tried to bring the League of Cities-Latino Caucus to other parts of the State.” The networking events were an immediate success, giving municipal leaders more immediate contact with the League of California Cities. It was something Padilla felt passionate about: “It’s tremendously empowering to know you’re not alone, and beyond just [having a] network, to really work with people in the same position that you are in in different cities throughout the State.” The Regional Networking Events continue today as one of the Latino Caucus’ signature programs.

During this juncture of the Latino Caucus’ history, questions about who the organization serves were beginning to form, asking leaders again to consider their place and purpose among California’s political landscape. “There is certainly much more representation today than there was twenty years ago of Latinos in elected office,” Padilla observes. “On the one hand, I think it is much more welcomed and embraced today than it was twenty years ago, but... the responsibility that we have as Latino elected

officials is a lot bigger today than it was then.” It is no longer enough simply to have Latinos elected to and advance in public office. Leaders are being faced with the reality that now, “as much as we’ve celebrated Latino mayors and city council members and Legislators, even Speakers of the Assembly and a Lieutenant Governor, our community is rightfully asking the question: ‘what difference has it made’ or ‘what has it all been for?’” Padilla then pinpoints the unique situation facing members of the maturing organization. “While being elected to office is worthy of recognition and celebration,” he says, “it’s what we do with the opportunity that is ultimately moving our community forward or not.”

Padilla decided to do with the opportunity what seemed a logical next step for a vibrant young leader: he took it to a higher level. In 2005, Alex Padilla became the first Latino President of the entire League of California Cities, giving him the unprecedented ability to bring local government issues impacting Latinos to a statewide platform while working side-by-side with other mayors and city council members on issues of importance to all Californians. Under his leadership, the Latino Caucus began to play a closer role with the League because, as Padilla asserts, “it’s a platform of issues that reflect the entirety of California, so it doesn’t tend to stray too much from the League of California Cities’ agenda. But again, what the Latino Caucus brings is the unique perspective of either Latino elected officials or the Latino communities that we represent or a combination of both.” By this time, he clearly understood that Latino issues were

California’s issues, and took the opportunity as President to lead by example.

Alex Padilla eventually stepped down from his role in local government only to become Senator Padilla in 2006. His performance in the State Legislature has been noted by the many successful bills he has authored to help improve not only the lives of those in his district or Latinos in particular, but all Californians. He says, “having begun a public office career at the local level, I know that any decisions made at the state level ultimately have a local community impact. So my model at the League and [at] the Caucus has been a tremendous foundation for bringing that perspective to budget and committee deliberations at the Capitol.”

In his work today, he still focuses his efforts on improving the living conditions for working families in California while maintaining his other legislative responsibilities. He contends that, “regardless of the issue facing the State of California, we will never make meaningful progress on a statewide basis unless and until we make significant progress in the Latino community, just by sheer numbers.” When speaking of the Caucus, he hits a realistic note: “The Latino Caucus continues to be relevant but certainly evolving in its role and responsibility. As the issues confronting our state and our communities evolve and [become] more complex, I think the Latino Caucus will continue to step up to the challenge of providing relevant and urgent information we need to make decisions and address these challenges.”



CORPORATE ADVISOR

Robert Apodaca had advocated for greater access to education and leadership for Latinos in California long before joining the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus in 2000 as a representative for MVE & Partners. He got his start in 1969 when he served as Director of the Educational Guidance Center, where he recruited Latinos from East Bay high schools to attend college at the University of California, Berkeley. From there he went on to launch an affordable off-campus student



MVE & PARTNERS  
ROBERT APODACA



housing project called Casa Joaquín Murrieta. Founded in 1970, the project has housed several thousand of UC Berkeley's Latino students over the past four decades.

This early career in public advocacy work introduced Robert Apodaca not only to the inner workings of public universities and city government, but also to promising young individuals who would help shape the future of California. One such youth was a high school student from Pinole, Maria Alegria, who went on to become that city's Mayor and the first ever Latina President of the League of California Cities. Robert remembers, "she was one of the students we worked with and we got her into [UC] Berkeley."

Mr. Apodaca eventually moved from education to work in pension fund advising until the late 1990s, when he "launched his current career in architecture." Mr. Apodaca was recruited to open the Oakland branch of MVE & Partners because the company "saw that there was going to be this resurgence in downtowns and more urban infill." The move back to California with one of the state's largest architectural firms allowed him to reconnect with people he had met early on as a community organizer. Many of them, like Maria Alegria, had gone on to become leaders in local government. Connecting to the Latino Caucus, then, came organically.

"It was a very exciting time for me to contribute to the Caucus because I was very much involved in redevelopment projects and rebuilding cities," says Apodaca of his early participation. He goes on to explain how, "in 1975 when cities first received community development funds, I used to represent the Fruitvale District. It was one of the community development district councils...We would provide input as to how that money would be spent." Ever since, he has "always continued to work with education [and] with cities."

Once he began working with MVE & Partners in California, Robert Apodaca "knew what the issues [were] in terms of urban infill developments. I knew what the interests of the cities were and I also had a fair amount of experience in doing transit-oriented developments." He first met Latino Caucus Executive Director John E. Arriaga in 1998 at a NALEO conference in Pasadena where he had organized eight out of the twelve speakers. The two agreed that they should keep in touch, as the

the Latino Caucus was in a period of real growth and was looking to develop more educational opportunities for its members.

Coming on board with MVE & Partners gave him the opportunity of working more closely with the Caucus. “I was very knowledgeable about the hot topics and I knew people from those different sectors,” says Apodaca, describing his early role as a corporate advisor to the Latino Caucus. “It was very easy for me to pull [speakers] together, layout the context for what I wanted to accomplish in the panel and then moderate it.” He went on to assist the moderating several programs, including the in Los Angeles and group of local elected experts from various for a two-day intensive a meeting of leaders sectors whose intimate speak honestly about



In this way, MVE & Partners only as a major corporate preparing local elected with complicated issues a time when California’s challenging Latinos to develop their economic base through homeownership and affordable housing opportunities.

played a key role not investor, but also in officials to deal related to housing at rapid growth was

When Robert Apodaca looks back at the twenty-year history of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus, he says he has “been truly impressed with the growth...In the 70s, you could count on one hand [the number of Latinos] on city councils. It is just amazing how now it is twenty-fold.”



# PAST PRESIDENT

When Nick Inzunza was elected to public office in National City, he broke a major barrier by becoming the first Latino mayor in San Diego County since 1848. That is, since before California was made part of the United States. As San Diego County consists of a total of eighteen cities and the incumbent had held office for 32 years, Inzunza attributes his historic victory to much more than a matter of identity. “I think we as a community do ourselves a great injustice,” says the former mayor, “when we assume that we will receive support from the Latino community since we are Latino.

# NICK INZUNZA

I think that we have to be good candidates first and represent our Latino community well in the hopes that everyone will vote for us, regardless of ethnicity.”

79 During his term, Mayor Inzunza chose to focus on “issues of social injustice, human and civil rights, representing the voiceless, those that were struggling through our society.” He adds that he, “dedicated [his] term as mayor to their [community’s] livability,” to helping his constituents in their day-to-day lives. He oversaw the construction of the National City Library and Southwestern College’s Higher Education Center, as well as the implementation of a sales tax increase. In September 2006, then-Mayor Inzunza declared National City a sanctuary for undocumented workers at the height of recent immigration debates. His charisma and energetic presence are also credited with bringing attention to a city often overlooked in San Diego’s South Bay, Inzunza’s efforts in taking on the Port Commission on behalf of National City being just one example.

As Mayor, Nick Inzunza also made a point of reaching out to the various communities he served in National City. “I was the first Latino mayor in San Diego [County] since 1848,” he boasts. “It has something to do with being a Latino, but it had a lot more to do with my ability to communicate in three languages with our diverse community.” While one might attribute his ability to speak English, Spanish and Tagalog—one of the major languages spoken by National City’s large Filipino population—to his surname or an upbringing in a Latino home, the

former mayor is quick to point out the contrary. Inzunza did not speak Spanish until he was in college, and only then took on the challenge because he recognized its larger social importance. “I don’t understand, frankly, most Californian elected officials who don’t speak Spanish at this juncture in our history,” he asserts. “I had to learn it. It was tough. I’m Mexican-American from the barrio, but I had to learn it.” Upon his election, then-Mayor Inzunza further reached out to his community by hiring a tutor to teach him Tagalog. He says it took “years until I was able to give a State of the City Address in Tagalog for two hours and I was able to give speeches and address my community in Tagalog.” Inzunza strongly believes that “those skills are important to be able to serve my community, my taxpayers. Is language important for me to be qualified? I think so.”

Also of importance to the former Mayor and League of California Cities-Latino Caucus President is learning from fellow elected officials. Inzunza joined the League of California Cities shortly after being elected mayor, and soon found an ideal place to develop his skills among members of the Latino Caucus. “I’ve always believed that people who are like-minded or share a common interest—whatever it might be, that commonality—have to attach [them]selves,” says Inzunza when speaking of the League of California Cities’ various Caucuses. “I felt like I came home when I got involved with the Latino Caucus...I just showed up and saw everybody doing the campesino clap in Sacramento.”

Yet beyond simply feeling “like I belonged, like I was home,” Inzunza found an enriching learning environment as well, especially for a young elected official early on in a challenging term in a city that had never elected a Latino mayor in the history of its statehood. “One of the things they don’t tell you when you become an elected official [is that] you need therapy. You can’t just be an elected official and look at budgets all day,” he says, almost joking. “You need a group of fellow mayors and council members telling you that everything is going to be okay. And the end result is that you stick it out and you become a better public official because of that therapy. The Latino Caucus really did that for me.”

“I learned a lot by working with others, communicating with others,” says Inzunza, for whom networking is no small detail in public service. “You sit around a room with twenty people that oversee city budgets and guess what—you have a lot to teach each other. A lot of us didn’t go to school to get a law degree, so this is something [we] have to learn over time and most of us have only been doing it two, four, six years. That’s nothing! So when we do it informally—through dinners and receptions and retreats—that makes the biggest impact. It’s not so much sitting down and hearing a seminar on housing or a training session on ethics,” he admits. “It was spending that constant quality time with other Latino electeds.” Serving as President of the Latino Caucus for two consecutive terms and as Mayor of National City for one has given Nick Inzunza unique insights into the presence and impact of Latino leadership in

California, with a nod to historical struggles and an eye on what changes the future brings. “I don’t think Latinos see themselves as a minority. I think that was prevalent in my father’s Chicano Movement generation, but it’s not prevalent in my generation or a little bit older or a little bit younger. I believe that the influence the Latino elected officials will have in California is that they are simply going to move this state in the right direction. A direction that is going to take a little more salsa and a little more lime because they are going to move it forward in a way that does not reject their culture, reject their language or reject where they came from, but instead embraces it.” Inzunza sees the Latino Caucus playing a vital role as it has in the past by providing local elected leaders with a venue for learning from one another as they move forward in developing strong communities. He feels that Latinos as a whole are “so involved with public policy now in the state,” and that “whatever we have been talking about for 30 or 40 years is now going to be embraced and is going to be part of the process, which it wasn’t before.” In short, he feels confident that the growing amount of Latino leadership statewide will yield greater integration of Latinos into the political process and, in turn, into California as a whole. That being said, “the Latino Caucus,” in his estimation, “is going to have to get deeper meaning on the issues, spend a lot more time focusing on those issues. Essentially, that is going to be the end result—the diversity of the Caucus itself.”

Currently, Nick Inzunza works as Vice President for Alta Vista Financial where he dedicates himself to “financing our community.”





# PAST PRESIDENT

San José Councilmember Nora Campos' work as President of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus is best described as bringing leaders and ideas together on a variety of issues facing Latino communities across the state. "For me," she admits, "what was very important was to be able to have a Summit where we brought not only councils and mayors, but school boards and college boards to the table, because the next level that we really need to start looking at is how we...



# NORA CAMPOS

are collectively bringing [together] all entities that are affecting our communities from the elected perspective.” The meeting President Nora Campos orchestrated was called the Latino Summit, and was a huge success that continues to be an integral part of the Caucus’ current priorities. That first two-day Summit, held in late 2006, provided a platform where members of the California State Legislature, California Latino School Board Association, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Southwest Voters Registration Educational Program and the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus could mobilize resources, build strong coalitions and create a common agenda. Under her leadership, the Latino Caucus truly advanced in its mission of advocating on behalf of the Latino community by partnering with key organization to achieve a more unified voice. For the future, Councilmember Campos hopes that collaboration will extend nationwide.

In her work at the state and local levels, the San José City Councilmember is known to be a strong advocate for equality and social justice. While one might attribute her drive to personal motivation and vision alone, Councilmember Campos credits her family and social foundations. The child of parents active in the Chicano Movement, Councilmember Campos participated in numerous United Farm Worker Union boycotts, marches and rallies organized by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta.

“It was something that was just instilled in us,” she explains “about working with the community, giving back, fighting for justice, social justice. It’s a value that I really, really am proud to have.” Councilmember Campos grew up in the same East San José community she currently represents as the only Latina/o councilmember in a city that has now become the nation’s tenth largest. “Believing strong, equitable neighborhoods are the foundation to great, sustainable cities,” the Councilwoman voices the needs of her 97,000 constituents on a variety of issues ranging from affordable housing and economic development to ensuring safe streets and quality education for all.

When reflecting on her background and how it impacts her decisions on local and state policy issues today, the San José Councilwoman admits that her early community organizing experiences remain sources of motivation. “Yes, we need to demonstrate,” she contends, “but we also need to be able to have our values not just at the table, but making the decisions and the policies that affect the cities that we represent. I truly believe that and I embrace that every day as I go to work. And every time that I look at an issue, I think about that, that we have got to be at the table. Not just one of us, but many of us at the table making policies, because if we can change policies in our cities, then we will be able to change policies and politics in California.”

For her, the activism of the civil rights movements has become the basis for greater political participation today. Whether it is an issue of public safety or environmental justice, Councilmember Campos voices the needs of underserved communities both at the local and statewide levels, even when it is unpopular. “It’s been challenging,” she says of acting on behalf of a community whose needs have been historically overlooked. “I think the good thing is that as a voice that sits on the council, I’m able to...[share] the bigger vision of where we need to be as a city” in terms of social justice and equality. “I think that has been embraced by the majority of residents in the city of San José.”

Councilmember Campos is also unwaveringly dedicated to advocating for greater representation of minority voices in all levels of government. “I think one of the things that as a society we have recognized is that as communities of color continue to get stronger, their voices continue to be more present at the table with developing policies,” she muses, then adds: “I think that fear of the unknown can shake up an establishment that likes the status quo.” In her own community, she co-founded the Latino Leadership Alliance, an organization “focused on creating a leadership network to advocate for Latino issues and develop future leaders.” Now, having started her own family and remaining dedicated to ensuring healthy communities for all, Councilmember Campos looks to the future. In particular, she sees the Latino Summit as a key

means of achieving effective leadership nationwide. “I would like to see [the Latino Caucus] look at the bigger picture beyond California, because I think that we have an organization that is unique. If we could model it across the US and other states, it would be so wonderful to be able to have a conference where you are bringing Latino caucuses at the same level that we are at to [be] able to talk about issues across the US.” At the end of her term as President, she addressed the Latino Caucus membership with a nod to the past and an eye on the future: “From a history of grassroots activism, the Latino community is developing a cadre of effective leaders that affect change from within government as well. The Latino Caucus is a part of that inspiring process, and we have come far in preparing for a stronger and more successful future.”



Congratulations Latino Caucus



on Twenty Successful Years!

Working in service territories throughout Southern, Central and Coastal California, Sempra Energy Utilities is committed not only to reflecting the diversity of the communities in which it operates, but also to considering the unique energy needs of those communities in an era where energy is key. Just what exactly is Sempra Energy Utilities? A Fortune 500 Company with two-thirds of its worldwide market based in California, Sempra Energy has

been ranked  
second  
among the  
“World’s



Most  
Admired  
Companies”



SEMPRA ENERGY UTILITIES

by Fortune Magazine for the past two consecutive years. Sempra Energy is the parent company of both San Diego Gas & Electric Company and Southern California Gas Company, which together serve over 20 million California residents in 251 cities from Orange County to Monterey and Fresno Counties.

87 For seven years now, Sempra Energy Utilities has ranked among the top five of Fortune's "America's Best Companies for Minorities." In California, the company understands that Latinos are a critical part of the state's demographic and cultural landscape. They became a corporate partner of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus, underscoring their awareness of and commitment to the energy concerns unique to Latinos and other communities of color. As Representative Stuart Wells notes, Sempra Energy Utilities "recognize[d] just how important the Latino Caucus was in the sense that it was grooming elected officials for higher office. It was addressing issues that arise in Latino communities, and those are things that were important to us as a company. We wanted to make sure we were paying attention to the issues that arise in Latino communities and that they had a voice with us, frankly." Wells explains that, "in our area—especially in Southern California—there are many Latinos and Latino elected officials in the communities that we serve. We wanted to make sure we were fostering the most positive relationship that we could with those communities and those people they were electing."

In Sempra's estimation, the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus, "gives those elected officials who seek higher office a forum to represent their communities and to show leadership within the State of California...So by supporting the Caucus' activities, it gives elected officials from the community that we serve the opportunity to show their leadership capabilities and enable them to have the possible opportunity to move on to higher office."

Sempra Energy Utilities is particularly vested in working with local elected Latino officials on a variety of energy related issues in the cities in which they operate. "We want to have a positive relationship with those municipalities and have made it a very high priority for both utilities," says Wells. "We

are in those cities and counties every single day, doing our business every day, providing our products to their constituents. We know that by virtue of our business, we have an impact in those cities and we do everything we can do to minimize the footprint, but also to develop relationships that can result in positive developments for those cities...Relations with the city and counties we work in are very, very high priorities for the company and to keep those relationships positive is very, very important.”

As the Latino leaders voice the need for equal distribution of energy and environmental justice resources, Sempra Energy Utilities sees its partnership with the Latino Caucus as a venue for making sure those issues are heard and met with action. As Wells points out on behalf of Sempra Energy, “we have infrastructure that we are constantly upgrading or adding to, because as California’s population grows, the demand for energy grows as well and we need to be upgrading and expanding our infrastructure to be able to meet the needs of all of our customers no matter what communities they live in. We are very sensitive to environmental justice issues where people want to make sure they are being treated fairly, like any other community. We want to make sure we are listening to them....to all the interests and all the concerns of all of those communities.” The company maintains that “supporting an organization and, more importantly, to be involved with an organization like the Latino Caucus has allowed us to do that much more effectively.”

As a proud sponsor of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus, Sempra Energy Utilities not only provides financial support but also acts as a key partner in energy issues facing our growing state. Wells adds that, “the best thing about the Caucus is how responsive they are about our issues as well. It’s very much a two-way street.” The company has addressed Latino Caucus leaders and League of California Cities members directly at a number of forums and conferences about environmental justice and renewable energy opportunities for California’s Latino communities, providing local elected leaders with vital information from a utilities perspective as they face complicated matters such as alternative energy development, infrastructure and energy efficiency. Sempra has found the Latino Caucus to have a high level of “commitment to those organizations that have been supportive of them and the recognition of how important energy issues are to this state and its future.”



“I see something new again. New blood.”

—Oscar Ríos, Founding Member



TODAY

“The Latino Caucus of the League of California Cities is probably the premier organization of its type in the country. It has been steady and growing over the years because people have nurtured it, celebrated it, have worked hard and have had a great staff. California has been enriched by it as well. Par to the organization that started off with a lot of people wondering, ‘What is this thing? Why do we have it? Is it a threat somehow?’, most of those questions have been resolved. It’s like most of those things that start off as controversy—it has become pretty mainstream and part of the organization.”

—Chris McKenzie,

League of California Cities Executive Director



Today, sixty percent of the California State Legislature is made up of officials who have served in local government. Current state lawmakers not only have a deeper understanding of the needs of cities and rural communities, but have also been directly impacted by the efforts of the League of California Cities and the Latino Caucus.

The unique thing about the Caucus is that it is a group of folks—Latinos—who are very open about letting other folks—non-Latinos—in. I think that is critical.

—Dave Mora,  
Salinas City Manager  
& Early Caucus Advisor

## CAUCUS



The League of California Cities-Latino Caucus now serves nationwide as a model in fostering the development and education of both new and seasoned local elected Latino officials. Past Caucus leaders have gone on to become integral members of all levels of state and federal government, including the United States Treasury and California State Legislature.



# PRESIDENT

Fresno City Councilmember Henry T. Perea considers himself fortunate: “The first day when I got elected—I was 25—the League was having a training [session] for newly elected officials...Having that training from people who have been doing this was critical, and that’s where I met people from the Caucus. They really served as my mentors. They were there to answer my questions and help me come into my own in determining where I was going to come down on city and policy issues.”



# HENRY T. PEREA

Not every twenty-five year old has the motivation and opportunity to run for public office, and while some might attribute his success to the sheer individual drive of that famous bootstrap myth, Perea sees his and similar stories with a little more historical clarity. He recounts the struggles against Separate But Equal at a time when speaking Spanish was outlawed in public schools and the rare Latino elected official found him or herself alone on issues of importance to the community. Perea is also firmly grounded in how “the Chicano Movement and several others were critical to [his] generation to open up those doors to be able to serve.” He is aware of the long history of grassroots efforts, of the thousands who went before him and made sacrifices for a better future for their children. “The reason I am here today at the age of twenty-five was because there was a Civil Rights Movement, because there was a Voting Rights Act and there were Latino leaders all across this country who were fighting the good fight. They were in the trenches.” He goes on to state simply that, “there are some big shoulders we are standing on that we have to do right by as future generations move through...You are seeing more and more Latinos involved in leadership and sought after. Those things don’t just happen by themselves.” Indeed, one good look through our nation’s history will show that “these things” never do “just happen.”

So what is he doing with it now? How does he carry this political heritage into his day-to-day work on the Fresno City Council and in the League of Cities? When he was starting out on the Council, Perea says he, “couldn’t make any mistakes...The expectations [for young councilmembers] are higher, but I think that makes you work harder, makes you more focused.” Those quick lessons have forged a strong voice in

Henry T. Perea, a voice that does not back down from asking difficult questions on a City Council where he is the youngest person and only Latino representing a city whose population is 46% Latino. On everything from education to environmental justice, Perea puts forth tough questions about the staggering disparities. “Why is it,” he asks, “that drop-out rates are typically higher among African-Americans and Latinos? Or why is it that any time we are going to drop in a new meat-rendering plant or nuclear power plant or something that is needed, why do we go to communities of color to locate these industries that then end up preventing true economic development for that neighborhood?” He feels it is critically important to raise these questions at the start of a decision-making process, rather than wait to see the outcome. As he describes, “now [the Latino Caucus and others] are in at the beginning saying, ‘no, this is how the legislation is going to affect us today’ and not make the next generation suffer through some of the negative impacts that could result.” He feels this is part of the power gained through struggle for equal rights: having a role to play in deciding on policies that impacts us all.

Back in 2002, it was Los Angeles’ then-City Councilmember Alex Padilla who pushed the newly elected Councilmember Perea to join the Latino Caucus, a move that would have a profound affect on his approach to policy making. Perea tells the story best when he says, “Alex was one of the first people I met. I had just gotten back from Sacramento and someone told me about this young councilman from Los Angeles. So one day I just called him out of the blue and said, ‘Hey, I heard you’re young.



I'm young and just got elected to the city council. You got any advice?" That was all it took for Padilla to recommend involvement with the Latino Caucus, "saying it would benefit [Perea] as a person and also [his] ability to serve at a greater level." Perea heeded the advice, eventually becoming President of the Latino Caucus in 2007. "Now, as President," he says, "I have such a treasure trove of people I can access...That really has opened up a lot of doors, a lot of opportunities."

When describing his role as President, Perea emphasizes that, "the overarching vision I have for the Caucus is one that is constantly grooming new leadership. In the era of term limits, city councils have become a training ground for the next legislators." How does this increased turnover translate to historically underrepresented communities? Perea answers that it "allows for greater representation and opportunities for people. As a Caucus, we need to make sure we are constantly developing leadership skills in our cities for those people who do want to move on to the county or the state, and we're doing that with our JFK Scholarship and our College Scholarship programs." The two new scholarships implemented by the Caucus afford dedicated local elected officials who desire to further their political careers an opportunity to attend the Harvard Kennedy School Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government, a program of which he himself is an alumni. The other scholarship extends financial support to college bound Latino students. "Hopefully we are grooming that next generation of Latino leadership, not just in politics, but in the arts, in economics, in grassroots

organizing and whatever it is they decide to do," Perea explains. "The important thing is that we are constantly grooming the next generation."

His term as Latino Caucus President has also been determined by his effectiveness at maintaining programs already in place. Again, he considers continuing the struggle a defining element of his life's work. One such example is the Latino Summit, a collaborative effort initiated by Past President Nora Campos that brings various organizations together to discuss shared goals and possible solutions to key issues facing California's Latino communities. He wants to take it one step further: "Now it's my responsibility as President to take that hard work and turn it into action" by bringing it to the national level. "Now that we are in collaboration with groups like MALDEF and others, we can identify common issues and work together to lobby Sacramento or Washington...We can speak in an even stronger voice." He sums up his two-term Presidency with humility when he says, "my time on the Caucus has really been in producing the results [for which] others have laid the foundation."

President Perea was selected in 2005 by American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) to attend a seventeen-day political exchange in Egypt and Jordan, and was appointed to the California Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission by Governor Schwarzenegger. Considered by many as a forward thinking advocate in the Central Valley, Councilmember Perea's track record includes a major "green" inner-city housing development, enhancing the city's creative economy and spearheading historic downtown renovations. He currently serves as Acting Council President for the City of Fresno.

“It was [Senator] Henry Mello who said, ‘I want you to meet John Arriaga and his wife.’ That’s how I met John Arriaga. He told me he was in Sacramento, he was a transportation lobbyist for the railroad. So right there we exchanged numbers and I told him I was trying to organize Latinos and told him we were coming to something in Sacramento. He offered his service. At that time, he had a little office...They were the ones who helped me put the papers together, the agenda together. That’s when John came and he started helping us out of his pocket. He started putting some resources together. He wasn’t an executive director, he just wanted to help us.”

–Oscar Ríos, Founding Latino Caucus Member & Former President

“John Arriaga showed up and basically offered to be our Executive Director. The first number of years he did it for free. So any communications he sent out, any of the organizational infrastructure, he took it upon himself to do for us. We’d make the decisions and tell him what to do and he would do it, but we never had any money to pay him.”

–California State Assemblywoman Anna Caballero

“John was the glue.”

–Dave Mora, Salinas City Manager & Early Caucus Advisor

“With the Latino Caucus, you have this special staff and that really helps because, if not, you are depending on folks organizing and putting things together as a sideline. But if you have someone like John, who knows what he is doing, things move along much better.”

–John Russo, Former League of California Cities President

“John’s involvement with the Caucus was invaluable because for many years he was a volunteer. We always called it por La Causa, an old slogan from the farm workers. He was always there and it came from the heart...I’ve always appreciated what [the staff] does. I still do.”

–John E. Márquez, Latino Caucus Board Member

“What was unique about the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus is their Executive Director, John Arriaga. He was in a lot of regions. He was actually in cities. He got down to our level [by] visiting and actually representing our jurisdictions, so many of us who were on city councils and school boards had a natural connection with the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus and also John Arriaga.”

–Fernando Armenta, Founding Latino Caucus Member

“It can’t be just John. This is a state organization...with two staffers. We don’t ask for much; we just want miracles.”

–Maria Alegria, Former Latino Caucus & League of California Cities President

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is no flourish to assert that the success of the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus is due in large part to the deep commitment of John E. Arriaga. The 20-year relationship began with one informal meeting: “I was hanging with [Caucus members] at a conference luncheon, at the end of the day in someone’s hotel room and just talking about these ideas that they’d like to do, and then deciding that they wanted to get something going within the organization because they didn’t feel...



# JOHN E. ARRIAGA

the League was meeting all their needs.” What the group lacked was a “nexus from one conference to the next,” he explains. “Because I was there all the time, they asked if I would help create the continuity from.” He began volunteering his time and quickly found that the group was running “into the red.” While the newly elected officials had big ideas, they had no one to pull it all together. So Arriaga says he “made a commitment to this organization that any time we held an event, I would see to it that we had event costs covered one way or the other.”

In the first years, he paid for everything from meeting spaces to incidentals, and staffed the organization free of charge. Quickly, he realized the need for more reliable funding and brought De La Rosa & Company on board as the Latino Caucus’ first sponsor with “the \$500 contribution” that John says, “would get us through a lunch and cover the costs of a small workshop where we would have a handful of electeds and a couple representatives from the Capitol.”

John Arriaga and his staff secured financial support for the Caucus in the years that followed and helped develop the infrastructure necessary to achieve their statewide goals. Former League Director Don Benninghoven remembers him, “making sure the meeting notices went out, that all the contacts were made, [and that] the schedules were in compliance.” Arriaga had recently gone into business for himself after serving ten years as Southern Pacific Railroad’s governmental relations director. He coordinated all Caucus activities from within his small lobbying firm in downtown Sacramento.

Arriaga himself is a lifetime California resident who grew up in the farm working community of Malaga. He became involved in politics from a young age when his father, who was actively involved in the local water district and had campaigned for California Congressman Bernie Sisk, asked the representative about an opportunity for his son to serve as a Congressional page. The experience, Arriaga says, gave him a sense of comfort among powerful political figures. Later, while studying political science at the University of California, Santa Cruz, what excited him most was questioning, “what it meant to be able to assist people who were either incapable because of lack of education or money or whatever to participate in [their] dreams.” Arriaga later set out for law school in the hopes of one day running for public office. His road to politics, however, veered in a different direction. In a sit down meeting with then-Congressman Tony Coelho, the mentor advised Arriaga not to run





for office right away. Instead he insisted John make a career elsewhere so, as he explained, “you can do it because you really want to do it and it’s not your job. It’s not your paycheck and you don’t compromise your principals.’ Shortly thereafter, he joined Southern Pacific. It was then he began traveling throughout cities in California, attending League of California Cities events and connecting with newly elected local officials hungry for equal representation within the organization.

To date, John Arriaga has built up a solid foundation of support for the Latino Caucus’ unique educational workshops, networking events, summit meetings and intensive training sessions. He has been instrumental in creating opportunities for past Caucus presidents to assume leadership roles within the League, including its first Latina and Latino Presidents. He has also helped strengthened the relationship between the League and its Latino Caucus: “When the League is trying to work with the Legislature so there is no take on local governments as far as their budgets go...they realize the value of our Caucus because we can go to go to the people now in a leadership role within the Legislature. I think that is where you’ve seen our role grow considerably over the years.” As the group continually strives toward its “next level” of development and impact, the Executive Director finds himself traveling across the country to meet with partnering organizations such as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, HELO, NALEO and many others, including other state level organizations. He has found that fellow caucuses look upon the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus

as a national model, a revelation that leaves him leaves him visibly proud of the work he and the group’s many hard working members have accomplished. In addition to its role in leadership development among local elected officials, the Caucus is now serving as an advisor to groups striving to achieve similar impact in their respective states.

Now the “next level” is bringing the Latino Caucus to an international level, beginning with a recent trip to Puerto Rico with NALEO and meetings between Caucus Board Members and Mexican officials. John says representatives from Baja, California have “a real interest in developing a long term relationship, something like a sister cities situation where some of our Latino elected officials can meet on a regular basis either there in Mexico or here in California and talk about the common issues like immigration, border issues and so forth. I see it as a real possibility.”

Meditating on the past twenty years of his involvement with the Latino Caucus and on its overall impact in California and the nation, Arriaga considers the organization one of the many needed to create change. “There is a place and a purpose for all organizations,” he explains, “that play a role in educating the population of our community. We happen to be an organization that focuses on local government. Back in the seventies, groups like the Brown Berets, who were similar to the Black Panthers, played their role in just bringing to light some of the huge disparities at that time and opening the pathway for others to be successful...I’d like to believe that we play an important role in the League of Cities and opened a path for others.”



# PROGRAMS

## CONFERENCES

In an effort to keep local elected officials updated on the latest in housing trends, city financing and budgets, and other critical issues, the Latino Caucus brings together government specialists, field experts and business leaders during Forums and Panel Discussions held in conjunction with the League of California Cities' Conferences.

## WORKSHOPS

Each year the Latino Caucus hosts a variety of workshops throughout the state on important issues impacting California communities. Our workshops feature experts and guest speakers from all levels of governmental, educational and private sectors, providing today's leaders with the information and tools necessary for effecting positive change and enhancing the quality of life in California.

## LATINO SUMMIT

"Networking and coalition-building among Latino Caucus members have allowed members to respond to the urgent issues affecting the Latino community, as a united voice."

~Nora Campos, Former Latino Caucus President & Founder of The Latino Summit

The Latino Summit is an intimate group of influential California leaders comprised of local elected officials, school board members and representatives from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), Southwest Voter Registration, Mexican American Legal Defense (MALDEF), the California School Boards Association and members from the Legislature's Latino Caucus. These leaders work together to create a working dialogue that focuses on collaboration and information sharing on local as well as global issues and their impact on Latino communities across California.

## REGIONAL NETWORKING EVENTS

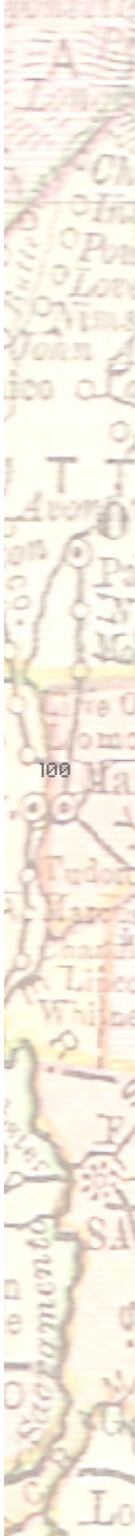
Each year the Latino Caucus hosts a variety of networking events throughout California, providing members with opportunities to mingle with colleagues, discuss matters of mutual concern and share key information on critical areas of interest to their communities. Latino Caucus Networking Events help local area elected officials and city leaders connect with one another and local businesses in an effort to make California a great place to live, work and raise a family.

## HARVARD FELLOWSHIP

The Harvard Fellowship Program with the Latino Caucus allows promising local elected Latino officials to attend a three-week Harvard Kennedy School program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government. Awards cover the program fee, housing, most meals and curricular materials. In helping to nurture the growth of Latino leaders in California, the Latino Caucus Harvard Fellowship Program provides local elected officials with the tools, resources and opportunities for professional development.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

The Latino Caucus is proud to contribute to the hardworking students who are pursuing their goals of higher education in three California regions: Northern (National Hispanic University), Southern (Loyola Marymount University) and Central (Fresno State University). The Latino Caucus scholarships provide students with the resources and opportunities necessary to become tomorrow's leaders. Investing in California's higher education at the local level is one more way the Latino Caucus is achieving its goal to develop, promote and foster leadership in California.



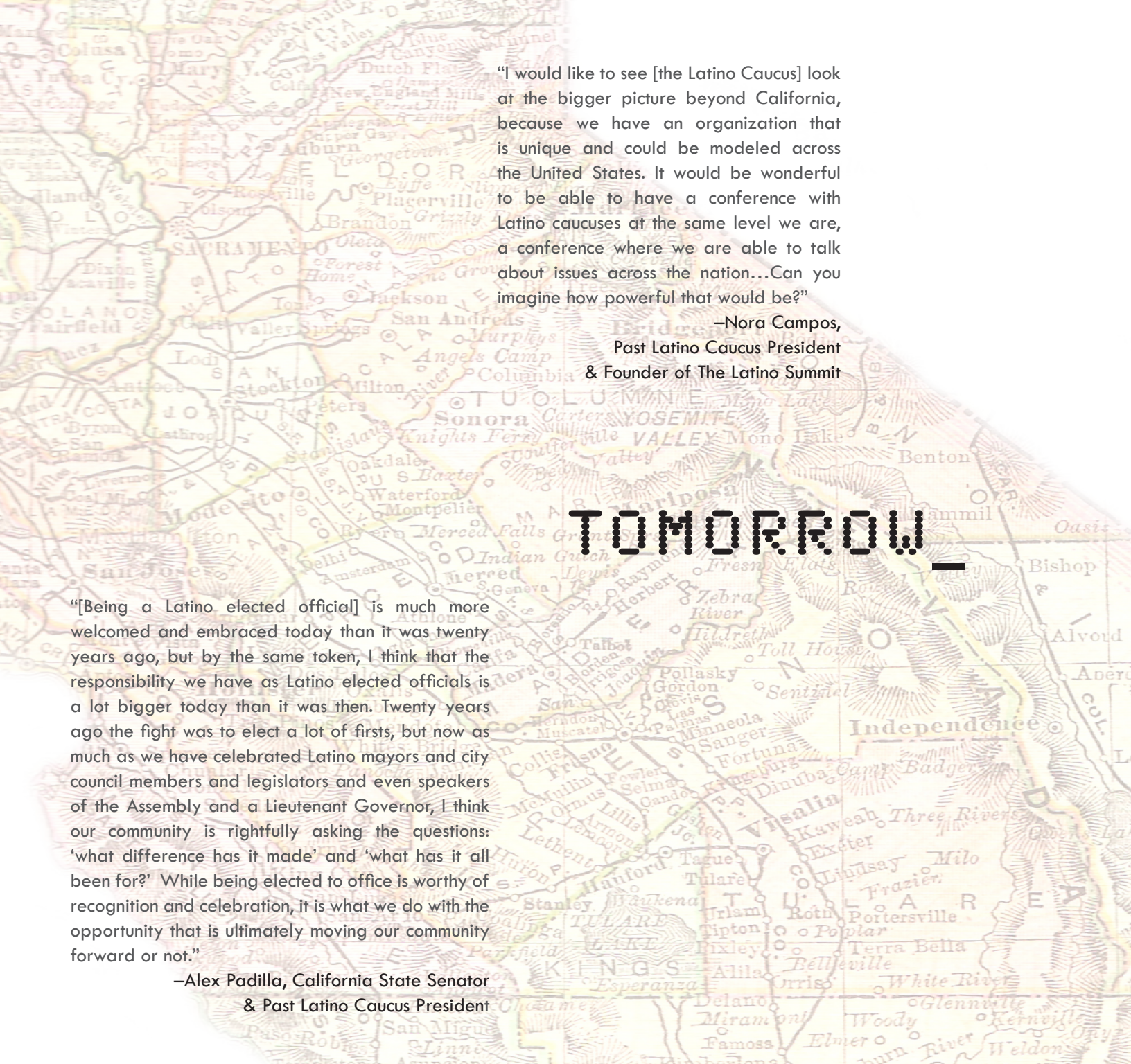


Tony Cárdenas was elected to the California State Assembly in 1996 and served as Chair for the Budget Conference Committee. Today, he represents District 6 on the Los Angeles City Council, a position he has held for more than six years. Mr. Cardenas currently sits on the Board of Directors for the League of California Cities and is next in line to assume the presidential responsibilities for the League of California Cities-Latino Caucus.



TONY CÁRDENAS





“I would like to see [the Latino Caucus] look at the bigger picture beyond California, because we have an organization that is unique and could be modeled across the United States. It would be wonderful to be able to have a conference with Latino caucuses at the same level we are, a conference where we are able to talk about issues across the nation...Can you imagine how powerful that would be?”


—Nora Campos,  
Past Latino Caucus President  
& Founder of The Latino Summit

# TOMORROW

“[Being a Latino elected official] is much more welcomed and embraced today than it was twenty years ago, but by the same token, I think that the responsibility we have as Latino elected officials is a lot bigger today than it was then. Twenty years ago the fight was to elect a lot of firsts, but now as much as we have celebrated Latino mayors and city council members and legislators and even speakers of the Assembly and a Lieutenant Governor, I think our community is rightfully asking the questions: ‘what difference has it made’ and ‘what has it all been for?’ While being elected to office is worthy of recognition and celebration, it is what we do with the opportunity that is ultimately moving our community forward or not.”

—Alex Padilla, California State Senator  
& Past Latino Caucus President





“I see the Caucus as really as an organization that’s going to grow...whatever we have been talking about for thirty or forty years is now going to be embraced and is going to be part of the process.”

—Nick Inzunza,  
Past Latino Caucus President

## TOMORROW

“It is not enough to say you’re Latino. Now you have to do something with it. You have to make change and make sure you are an elected official for everybody, not just Latinos. People say that if you are part of a minority community that you will only represent that interest. That is unfair. You will have a greater sensitivity to what is happening with those issues in those particular constituencies, but that does not mean you don’t represent everybody. We have to get to the point where we’re actually doing good, changing neighborhoods at a more local, grassroots level... Producing results is going to be critical. Running and winning for the sake of being Latino or being young is no longer good enough. We are going to have to produce meaningful results.”

“The Caucus will only get stronger as time goes on...Generations are going to get involved at a much younger age now because they have had the opportunity to see my generation break into politics at a younger age. I think they are going to feel more empowered to not wait until they are fifty to run for office, but do it when they are in their twenties and thirties. They have a different perspective and they are going to want to make sure that is represented. So I think you are going to see the next generation even more engaged and more involved. That’s encouraging.”

—Henry Perea, Latino Caucus President





# CREDITS\_

**Source materials** for this book include personal interviews, organizational records and other published materials as referenced.

**Introduction:** Graphs prepared with the assistance of Brianne Gilbert with information from the National Association of Latino Elected Officials

**Photographs** [by page number, left to right]:

- Dedication - (Courtesy of John E. Arriaga) Ramón Gomez, Richard Polanco, Joe Garcia, Enid Gallegos, José Medina, Deborah V. Ortiz, John Márquez, Nell Soto, Dario Frommer, Marco Antonio Firebaugh, Senator Jenny Oropeza, Bob Pacheco, Maria Alegria, John E. Arriaga, Assembly Member Anna Caballero, Oscar Ríos, Sam Torres
- 4 - a. Oscar Ríos  
b. (Courtesy of Sam Torres) George Shirakawa (middle)  
at Latino Caucus “Convocation of Empowerment” circa 1993
- 5 - a. (Courtesy of Sam Torres) Sam Torres, Congressman Joe Baca, Robert Nava  
b. (Courtesy of Oscar Ríos) Unidentified
- 10 - (Courtesy of Oscar Ríos) Oscar Ríos, Ana Ventura Phares, Maria Alegria, Assembly Member Anna Caballero, John E. Arriaga, Maria Giuriato
- 14 - (Courtesy of Sam Torres) Congressman Esteban Torres, Congressman Joe Baca, Nell Soto
- 18 - (Courtesy of John E. Arriaga) Marco Robles, Sam Torres, Senator Art Torres, Oscar Ríos, John E. Arriaga
- 26 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Maria Alegria, Dolores Gallegos, John Márquez
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- 40 - (Courtesy of Sam Torres) Al Lopez, Assembly Member Anna Caballero
- 42 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Senator Alex Padilla, Maria Alegria
- 59 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Rosario Marin, Maria Alegria, Maria Contreras-Sweet,  
Assembly Member Anna Caballero, Nora Campos
- 60 - (Courtesy of Oscar Ríos) Assembly Member Anna Caballero, Maria Alegria
- 68 - (Courtesy of Oscar Ríos) Maria Alegria, Art Armendariz, Ana Ventura Phares,  
Assembly Member Anna Caballero, Senator Alex Padilla
- 76 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Unidentified, Esteban Vasquez, Tonia Reyes Uranga, Robert Apodaca, Randall Hernandez
- 89 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Legislative Latino Caucus Chair Assembly Member Joe Coto, Nora Campos,  
Assembly Member Tony Mendoza
- 90 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Southern California Housing Summit participants
- 97 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Jim Madaffer, Maria Alegria, Senator Alex Padilla, John E. Arriaga
- 100 - (Courtesy of LCCLC) Henry T. Perea, Dolly Sandoval, John E. Arriaga, Frank Quintero



