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Survey Shows Latino Voters are Up for Grabs Economy Surges as their Major Concern

Washington, D.C. – The Board of Directors of The Latino Coalition (TLC) and the Hispanic Business Roundtable (HBR) today released the results of their 2003 National Hispanic Survey at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The survey was conducted by McLaughlin & Associates' Opiniones Latinas. One thousand Hispanic adults in the U.S. were interviewed from August 11 – 16, 2003 for this survey, which has a margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$

“This year’s survey shows that Latinos are concerned over the economy, but very optimistic about their future,” said HBR President Honorio Padron of Chicago, Illinois. “30% of Hispanics cited the economy as their number one concern. By almost a 2-1 margin (62%-33%) Latinos cited the economy over national security when asked which issue is more important when deciding their vote for President.”

“However, when asked if they expect the economy, one year from now, to be better or worse, 61% said better and only 15% said worse,” Padron added. “If you add this to the 71% that said that the quality of life for their children will be better than theirs, you realize that this is an extremely optimistic community, that is very confident about their future.”

The Political Front. The survey showed once again that the Hispanic vote remains up for grabs and that both parties will have to fight hard for this growing segment of the electorate. While 40% of those interviewed identify with the Democratic Party, compared to only 20% with the Republicans, this number has been dropping significantly since the 2001 survey when by a margin of 55-17 Latinos identified with the Democratic Party. While the number of Republicans has remained steady, the number of independents has nearly doubled. However, the good news for Democrats is that if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, Democrats would beat Republicans by a 55-25 margin.

“President Bush remains popular among Latinos and has developed a very strong base of support in preparation for the 2004 elections,” said TLC President Robert Deposada. “The President is starting the campaign season with a solid base of support against a generic Democratic candidate and against the top two Democratic contenders (Kerry & Dean) that surpasses in many cases his support in the 2000 election. This is important because under this scenario, the Democratic candidate would have to get almost all undecided Hispanic voters in order to remain competitive in the general election. This would be extremely hard to accomplish particularly when you look at the President’s high favorable ratings (49%) and the high level of support for tax cuts and other major initiatives promoted by the President.”

The survey also shows that none of the Democratic Presidential candidates have captured the imagination of Hispanics. 62% of Hispanics remain undecided, and only 8.4% support Joe Lieberman, 7% John Kerry and only 3% for both Howard Dean and Richard Gephardt. “After an all-out summer effort to reach out to Hispanic voters, these numbers are very disappointing. Clearly as of today, Democrats do not have a candidate with strong ties to the Latino community that could help them get enough Latino support to recapture the White House.”

Key Issues of Concerns to Latinos. While the economy emerged as the most important issue affecting Latinos (29.8%), education (12.8%), immigration (6.8%) and health care (5.9%) rounded up the list of the top four most important issues affecting Hispanics.

“In this survey **health care** emerged as a very important issue to U.S. Latinos,” Deposada added. “35% of Hispanics in this survey were uninsured. Only 40% had private health insurance. Affordability clearly is the most important health issue affecting Hispanics. No wonder why Latinos overwhelmingly support (81%) legislation in Congress that would provide a \$3,000 refundable tax credit to purchase health insurance. Latinos would overwhelmingly support (82%) candidates who support this legislation. Both parties should take a close look at this issue.”

When asked what would be the best strategy to improve the **economy** and create jobs, 53% supported lowering taxes on families and business, while 33% supported maintaining the current level of spending and taxes. Only 7% supported raising taxes to increase government spending.

Immigration once again appears to be a very important issue to U.S. Latinos. 91% of Latinos thought reforming immigration laws in order to reduce illegal immigration by promoting a system which increases the legal flow of workers into this country is important to them. Latinos approve of President Bush’s handling of the immigration issue by a 43-36 margin, and 64% support the “Matricula Consular”. “The issue of immigration has become an extremely important symbolic issue for Latinos. While not all Latinos are affected by immigration policies, they view this as a litmus test, either you are for us or against us,” Deposada added. “Even groups that are not impacted by immigration laws, like the Puerto Rican community, overwhelmingly thought of this as a very important issue to them.”

Education is the second most important issue for Hispanics according to this survey. While Latinos still rate their local schools negatively by a 49-46 margin, the trend has improved dramatically from three years ago, when the margin of disapproval was 58-38. Violence and drugs (24%), overcrowding (19%) and lack of quality teachers (14%) are the three biggest problems facing public education.

When asked about whether government-run **affirmative action** programs should rely solely on race or if more emphasis be placed on income levels as the best way to focus on those most in need. Overwhelmingly (86%) wanted the focus to be on income levels.

The survey also showed:

- 69% do not have a 401k
- 61% do not have \$5,000 or more saved for retirement
- 43.2% do not have access to the Internet
- 58.6% of Hispanic households have children under the age of 18
- 42.4% do not have a credit card
- 47.6% or nearly half of all Hispanics regularly use a cellular phone
- 47.0% do not own or have access to a computer in their home
- 29% felt they were discriminated against because of racial or ethnic background

The Latino Coalition is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. TLC was established to address policy issues that directly affect the well-being of Hispanics in the United States. TLC's agenda is to develop and promote policies that will foster economic equivalency and enhance overall business, economic, and social development of Hispanics. For more information, or to download the entire survey, or past surveys, please visit our website at www.TheLatinoCoalition.com.

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