



Honduran-Americans Seek Political Empowerment

Announcing the Honduran American Political Action Committee (HAMPAC)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 9th, 2004

Contacts:

José Francisco Ávila (917) 783-5298
hondurasamericanpac@yahoo.com

New York – Announcing the formation of the Honduran-American Political Action Committee (HAMPAC), is a registered unaffiliated non-partisan Political Action Committee. Our activities will focus on voter education, grassroots organizing, issue advocacy, and candidate endorsement.

According to José Francisco Avila, Chairperson, “We will seek to inject ourselves into the political agenda of the Local and state elected officials through political action, advocacy and education. Despite our many positive contributions to the social and economic fiber of New York, we’ve remained outsiders with no influence on the important political processes of the city and state of New York. We have been, in a word, “invisible”.

In a 1997 interview by Hispanic Magazine, Angelo Falcon, president of the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy noted “A lot of people were not very conscious of the very large number of Hondurans in the city until a few years ago. There was a fire in a social club in the Bronx. That was a real tragedy because 87 people died, and it turned out that the vast majority of those people were Hondurans. That was the first time that people became aware that there was a Honduran population in the city.”

The turning point for the Honduran-American community, came last September, when a week before it was scheduled to take place, organizers of the 7th Annual Honduran and Central American Day Parade had to seek the assistance of Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión to avoid the parade’s cancellation, because the New York Police Department withheld the required permit allegedly based on lack of documentation and short notice application. Parade organizers presented an entire portfolio containing copies of parade-related documents including their application dated April 2003. Despite pressure from the Carrión administration, the NYPD again declined the permit citing personnel limitations and an unusual number of other events scheduled for the same day in The Bronx. President Carrión had to speak to Mayor Bloomberg who instructed that the parade be allowed and that the required 15 police officers be provided for the parade and the Honduran Food and Music Festival that followed in Crotona Park. “It was very frustrating running around from one elected official to the next to no avail but we persevered and were finally able to meet with the Borough President,” said Rejil Solis, president of the Garifuna Coalition USA, Inc.

Ironically, just a day before, Miguel Estrada a Honduran and President Bush’s nominee for a federal appeals court judgeship, had withdrawn his name from consideration, ending a bitter battle with Senate Democrats who blocked his nomination. Mr. Estrada’s nomination caused controversy among some national Latino groups. The *Legal Times* reported that Mr. Estrada’s nomination is “reviving sharp divisions in the Hispanic legal community. United States Senate candidate Michael Benjamin, (R-NY) whose mother was born in Honduras said “It’s time for Senator Charles Schumer to demonstrate the leadership expected of a Senator from New York, and not tow the partisan line set out by New York’s junior Senator Hillary Clinton and the rest of the Democratic leadership. His irresponsible efforts to block the Estrada nomination set a bad constitutional precedent and are a set-back to the Hispanic community,” added Mr. Benjamin.



According to Mr. Avila these two events were a rude awakening and he and Mr. Solis decided that this would never happen again to their people. Therefore, he spent time meeting with the Honduran Consul General's Office, the Garífuna Coalition USA, Inc. and the Federation of Honduran Organizations of New York (FEDHONY) and consulted with Tomas Alberto Avila, current president of the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee (RILPAC) to find ways and come up with strategies to avoid this situation from repeating itself. It was through these discussions, that he came to the conclusion that it was necessary to fill the existing political void of the Honduran American Community of New York and a nonpartisan political action committee was the best alternative.

The PAC will conduct community forums and study circles to address policy issues in an organized way; that will involve hearing multiple perspectives on issues, in order to decide which candidates to endorse. The committee will organize fundraising activities for the endorsed candidates.

"The Latino community represents a rich, untapped source of potential voters," said Raul Yzaguirre, National Council of La Raza (NCLR) President in a recent press release. "It is in the best interest of our country to ensure that civic participation is strengthened across the board."

According to the NCLR, over 5.7 million Latinos participated in the presidential election in 2000, and based on U.S. Census data that number could increase by as many as 1.9 million voters in 2004. In addition to effective outreach, one of the keys to improving Latino political participation is providing the community with the necessary tools. Access to voter registration is one of those tools, and combined with other mobilization efforts it is an important step toward making Latino voices heard.

Due to the violent political system they experienced back in Honduras, many Hondurans are apathetic about the political process and as a result have not exercised their right to vote, even after becoming US citizens and thus entitled to vote. HAMPAC will promote voter education, registration and participation in the Honduran and Central American communities. It will also help educate and inform political officeholders in New York regarding issues of concern to the Honduran and Central American communities. The goal will be to register at least 5,000 voters and mobilize them to vote on the upcoming 2004 Presidential elections, as well as the 2005 citywide elections.

The Committee will also get involved in naturalization drives in order to increase the number of Hondurans who become citizens and thus entitled to vote.

Hondurans represent the largest Central American group in New York City. According to the New York City Department of Planning's Demographic Profile: New York City and Boroughs, 1990 – 2000. Central Americans represented 4.6% of New York City's Total Hispanic Population.

The Central American Population experienced a 2.1% decrease between the 1990 and 2000 Census but the Honduran population was the only subgroup to experience a 15.5% increase during the same period. By some estimates, including that of the Honduras General Consulate of New York, the Honduran population has reached over 125,000. Many believe that the difference between the Census numbers and the estimates is buried in the 401,108 who classified themselves as "Other Hispanic". The Other Hispanic category represents the largest population change between 1990-2000; the 247% increase was larger than that of both the Mexican and Dominican subgroups.