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**Looking Beyond 2014:
Making Hispanics a Force
to be Reckoned With**

By Janet Murguía (September 24, 2014)

Latinos will remember 2014 for the election in which fear triumphed over hope and common sense. In June, Speaker John Boehner gave in to the most extreme elements of his caucus and put the final nail in the coffin when it came to acting on comprehensive immigration reform. Electoral fears were also behind the President's recent decision to postpone executive action until after the election. Senate Democrats in close races across the country have chosen to run away from the issue and, by extension, our community.



It seems as if in this election season, both Democrats and Republicans fear everything except for the Latino community. What else would explain how one party continues to vilify us and the other abandons us when we become inconvenient? The question facing our community is how to make sure that this is the last election where either party is able to ignore us.

First, we have to look past this immediate problem and think about the long-term. One of our community's most important achievements in the last two decades has been making Hispanics a force to be reckoned with in presidential elections. Thanks to the tireless voter registration and other civic engagement efforts of NCLR and many of our sister organizations, we have proven that the road to the White House leads through the Latino community and our vote and our voice will make the difference in the next presidential contest. But our goal should also be to make sure that we are influential in 2018 and every election thereafter at every level of government.

Second, I agree with [Angelo Falcón](#): we need to get "back to basics." That means doing the tough and unglamorous work of retail politics-urging all those who are eligible to become citizens, registering them to vote, and getting them to the polls on Election Day. And we cannot wait for generations to transform the American electorate. NCLR is very proud that we have registered more than 400,000 new voters since 2008, but we have just scratched the surface. Look at our community's numbers. There are 7.9 million legal permanent-resident Latinos who are already eligible to become citizens but have not yet naturalized. Another 9.6 million are U.S. citizens but are not registered to vote. And nearly five million Latinos who were registered to vote in 2010-the last midterm-did not vote in that election.

Third, we need to focus our community better on other parts of the trench warfare involved in the political process. We are still vastly underrepresented in elected office. A good way to start increasing those numbers is for more Latinos from both parties to run for local office, especially school boards and public commissions. These positions not only lead to higher office, but have enormous responsibility and clout in and of themselves.

Finally, 2021 will be a vital year for Latino empowerment. That is when the U.S. Census Bureau will release the results of the 2020 census and state legislatures begin redistricting. We need to give greater support to the Latino organizations that are involved in drawing the electoral maps, which will determine the political clout of the Latino community in the 2020s. Redistricting and an accurate census will impact not only the make-up of state legislatures, but also that of the House of Representatives. If we want to see that chamber become more representative of this nation's changing demographics, we have to be at the table when the issue is debated.

We can never let what happened to us in the 2014 election happen again. We are rightfully frustrated and disappointed, but we can never give up the power we have to make a difference.

***Janet Murguía** is President and Chief Executive Officer of NCLR (The National Council of La Raza), the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. As someone who has experienced the promise of the American Dream first-hand, she has devoted her career in public service to opening the door to that dream to millions of American families. She can be reached at news@nclr.org.*