



HISPANIC DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION
of NEW JERSEY
Building Bridges to a Better Life

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Governing New Jersey as One Community

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The greatest challenge for Governor Corzine is not just balancing the budget, but how to do it while reducing poverty and expanding opportunity. Governor Corzine inherits three New Jerseys: The wealthiest twenty percent who constitute one of the richest most powerful blocs in the country; the poorest twenty per cent who are falling further behind every day; and finally, the sixty per cent in the middle many insecure about their future. Any of us who have dealt with Jon Corzine know he is deeply sincere about creating one New Jersey community, the central theme of his inaugural address. It is up to all of us to help him achieve this beautiful goal.

One community means that the voiceless and vulnerable have to be protected in times of fiscal crisis. Out of crisis comes opportunity to do things differently and to use resources more wisely. Beyond the obvious need to make our tax system more progressive, there are three initiatives that could go a long way to creating one New Jersey.

It starts with education. Governor Corzine's national search for a Commissioner of Education must yield a person who is not only a fiscal wizard, but also capable of releasing the creative energy among our educators and parents to change our schools. Abbott decisions have equalized funding for financially poor schools, but have not opened them to cultural changes that will close the gap in performance.

Preschool is a beacon, but until school districts see this initiative as a long-term collaboration with community educators, it will not realize its promise. Across New Jersey, the Abbott preschool program relies heavily on community-based organizations, however, there is a two-tier class system, in which community organizations are not fully funded when compared with the school based preschools. This inequitable system must be turned around to ensure we get all children in quality preschools within our means.

Human services is the safety net upon which to build a better future. A comprehensive planning approach to carefully allocate the ten billion dollars in the state budget for these programs is long overdue. There needs to be an open and transparent review of the effectiveness of all our human services programs to be sure the resources are reaching our most vulnerable residents. The review would help control costs and provide better results.

Success in reforming mental health and children's services are of particular concern for Latinos, as they are for the population-at-large. Mental health officials need to continue to work to increase culturally competent services in the language of the patient. Children's services need to put more emphasis on preventing child abuse. So far, the state has dedicated itself to building too many layers of bureaucracy rather than inspiring community action. More effort on prevention today will make for a leaner bureaucracy tomorrow.

Finally, we have to do more to protect workers rights. Latinos feel this pain acutely because we are a majority of the working poor and suffer exploitation on a daily basis. A policy level interdepartmental task force should

be created immediately to make lower wage workers rights a major concern. There needs to be greater emphasis on literacy training for the work place and English as a second language courses. This task force must deal with the large undocumented workforce to ensure that they are not illegally exploited and victimized. Until the federal government can find the political courage to address this issue on a national level, we must do it in New Jersey.

One community is a dream that must not fail.

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