



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Dean G. Skelos

## Hundreds Attend Unidad Latina Conference Hosted by State Senate & Hispanic Federation

DEAN G. SKELOS October 24, 2011



*Discussions Focus on Business Growth & Job Creation*

The first annual Unidad Latina conference held in New York City this weekend was an enormous success that brought together hundreds of people from the Hispanic community in New York, including leaders from business, education, health care and government to

discuss ways to promote economic growth and job creation. The conference was organized by the New York State Senate and the Hispanic Federation.

“This conference was an impressive gathering of bright, talented people who came together to discuss how to make the Latino community more prosperous,” Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said. “Every conference room and ballroom was filled with people committed to giving Hispanic-owned entrepreneurs the resources they need to grow and improving the quality of life for Latinos.”

Among the bipartisan group of legislators who attended were: state Senators Charles Fuschillo, John Flanagan, Jack Martins, Martin Golden, Jim Alesi, Lee Zeldin, Jeff Klein, Diane Savino and David Carlucci; Assemblymembers Nicole Malliotakis, Guillermo Linares, Naomi Rivera, former Assemblyman Roberto Ramirez and former New York City Councilman Fernando Ferrer.

“I greatly appreciate everyone that attended and participated in Unidad Latina, especially our partners at the Hispanic Federation,” Senator Skelos said. “Throughout the weekend people shared their experiences and insights to help others succeed. The information was valuable, the camaraderie was enjoyable, and we look forward to building on this event in the future.”

More than 200 people attended a luncheon that featured remarks from Richard Parsons, Chairman of Citigroup and former CEO of Time Warner; as well as a presentation by Jorge Silva-Puras, Regional Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Also speaking at the luncheon was Assemblyman Guillermo Linares of Manhattan. Dr. Linares was the first Dominican-born elected official in the United States and was appointed by President Bill Clinton to Chair the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

A gala dinner, held Saturday night, began with the national anthem sung by Marybeth Melendez, a visually impaired graduate student at the College of Staten Island. The gala was emceed by Jeanine Ramirez of NY1 News, who has traveled to Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic for special feature reporting assignments.

Featured speakers at the dinner included Lillian Rodríguez López, President of the Hispanic Federation; Monika Mantilla, founder, President and CEO of Altura Management and Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis, whose mother came to the United States from Cuba.

Special awards were presented at the dinner to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the Hispanic community.

The Unidad Latina Award for Excellence in Education was presented to Dr. Tomás Morales, the President of the College of Staten Island.

The Unidad Latina Community award was given to Gil Bernardino, the Executive Director of Circulo De La Hispanidad, a non-profit Hispanic community organization in Nassau County.

The Unidad Latina Award for Excellence in Business was presented to Juan Figueroa, an owner of Milestone Mechanical, a heating and cooling company in Manhattan that focuses on energy-efficient buildings. After beginning just three years ago, the company has achieved almost \$2 million in sales.

The Unidad Latino Legacy Award was presented to Rita DiMartino, a member of the CUNY Board of Trustees and former vice President of Congressional Relations for AT&T. Ms. DiMartino also served in leadership roles with UNICEF.

In addition, Senator Lee Zeldin presented an award for Business Person of the Year to Santiago Reyes, a restaurant owner in Suffolk County.

Other speakers at Unidad Latina were: New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Irene M. Esteves, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer for Time Warner Cable Inc.; Dr. John B. King, Commissioner of Education and President of the State University of New York; and former New York City Council Member Fernando Ferrer.

Unidad Latina Conference workshops included the following:

> Minding Our Business: Protecting and Supporting Latino Small Businesses – There are almost 100,000 Hispanic-owned small businesses in New York City. This workshop focused on promoting Latino job growth and the unique challenges faced by Latino businessmen through loans, small business development and other measures.

Participants included: Hector Cordero Guzman, a professor at the School of Public Affairs at Baruch College; Paul Quintero, President of ACCON NY; Luis Balzac, former Director of Puerto Rico Industrial Development Corp.; and Das Velez, Executive Director of Minority and Women Business Development for ESDC. The workshop was moderated by Senator Martin Golden.

> Got Jobs? Promoting Latino Job Growth – The unemployment rate for Hispanics in New York City has increased from seven percent to more than 12 percent from 2007 to 2010. This discussion focused on what is being done at the government and community levels to help Latinos and others find jobs. It included discussions about job training, adult education and

support for small businesses.

Workshop participants included: Alexander Saavedra, Vice President/Director of SEEDCO; Edwin Melendez, Director of Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College; Jorge Martinez, a Trustee in the Village of Freeport; Alfredo Placeres, President of the NYS Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; and Ken Pokalsky, senior Director of Government Affairs for the Business Council of the State of New York. The workshop was moderated by Senator Jim Alesi.

> Bridge to a Healthier Tomorrow: Addressing Latino Health Disparities – This workshop focused on the health disparities that imperil the well-being of the Latino population, which is disproportionately impacted by diabetes, asthma, HIV/AIDS, cancer, cardiovascular disease and the lack of health insurance. Panelists discussed successful community-based health care initiatives and public policies that can promote solutions to Latino health care needs.

Participants included: Paloma Hernandez, President of the Urban Health Plan; Wayne Keathley, President and CEO of Mount Sinai; Guillermo Chacon, President of the Latino Commission on AIDS; and Dr. Alvaro Carrascal, Senior Vice President for Cancer Control of the American Cancer Society. The workshop was moderated by Senator Jeff Klein.

> Las Olvidadas: Confronting the Latina Teen Suicide Crisis – According to the Centers for Disease Control in New York City, more than one Latina teenager out of every seven has attempted suicide. This workshop focused on how to prevent suicide among Latina

adolescents.

Workshop participants included: Dr. Rosa Gil, President of Comunilife; Dr. Leopoldo Cabassa, from the Psychiatric Institute Center of Excellence; Dr. Manny Gonzalez from the Hunter College School of Social Work; and Dr. Maria Oquendo, from the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University. The workshop was moderated by Senator Diane Savino.

> Our Future Depends on It: Increasing Latino College Success – While Latino college enrollment rates have been increasing over the last 10 years, Hispanics currently have the lowest college graduation rates of any major population group. This panel helped to identify programs and strategies to support and accelerate Latino college success rates to stimulate long-term community wealth and development.

Workshop participants included: Frank Sanchez, CUNY Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs; Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, President of the Hispanic Federation; Frances Lucerna, Executive Director of El Puente Academy; and Carlos Medina, Associate Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor of the SUNY Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The workshop was moderated by Senator Jack Martins and Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis.

In addition to the workshops, a CUNY youth roundtable discussion was conducted by Senator John Flanagan to discuss career challenges and opportunities. The roundtable included a number of CUNY students, along with Senators Golden and Alesi,

Assemblywoman Malliotakis and senior CUNY officials including Senior Vice Chancellor and Secretary to the Board of Trustees Jay Henderson, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Frank Sanchez, Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges Eduardo Marti and CUNY Trustee Rita DiMartino.

Organizations participating in the Unidad Latina Conference included: Adelante of Suffolk County, Alianza Dominicana, the Brooklyn Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Business Council of New York State, Catholic Charities, Circulo de La Hispanidad, the College of Staten Island, the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans, the Hispanic Brotherhood of Rockville Centre, the Institute for Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, the Long Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the New York City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.