

# Presidential Candidate Senator John F. Kerry

LULAC issued the LULAC Challenge to both presidential candidates to afford them the opportunity to explain their position on what we have determined to be the top ten crucial issues affecting the Latino community. We hope this will help you and other Hispanics make the best decision on election day. The below is the response from candidate Senator John F. Kerry.



## EDUCATION

Education is at the core of America's basic promise - that all Americans should be able to make the most of their potential.

Over 40% of Hispanics in the United States over the age of 25 do not have high school diplomas. In 2001, over 30% of Hispanic students in high school dropped out. I will expand and improve early childhood education and Head Start programs, and I will fully fund the No Child Left Behind Act. I will offer a "New Bargain for America's Children and Teachers" to recruit and retain 500,000 teachers over the next four years.

I have a plan to help 1 million more students graduate in the next five years by enforcing the accountability provisions in No Child Left Behind for dropouts, investing in anti-dropout efforts like offering mentoring in middle school, shrinking big and unsuccessful high schools, and strengthening the high school curriculum.

As president, I will help more students attend college by taking on the three most critical barriers standing in the way of college success: inadequate academic preparation, the unnecessarily complicated financial aid process and the rising cost of college tuition.

I will expand the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) to serve 2 million children per

year. I will make it easier for students and families to learn how student aid programs will help them pay for college. I will also offer a College Opportunity Tax Credit that is refundable and available to students at the start of the school year—enabling more students to take full advantage of the benefits.

## CIVIL RIGHTS and JUSTICE

Civil rights laws are just that: laws. As a former prosecutor I know something about enforcing laws. And when I am president, I will make it one of my top priorities to fully and vigorously enforce our nation's civil rights laws. I am an original co-sponsor of the Fairness Act, which will roll back the damage that conservative federal judges have done to our nation's civil rights laws and ensure that all victims of discrimination have access to the courts and to justice. I will also work to eliminate racial profiling.

I am now, and have always been, strongly in favor of affirmative action. America's diversity is a strength, not a weakness. I want to focus the nation on an all out effort to reduce racial disparities in education, employment, income, wealth, health, home ownership and business ownership. I am committed to doing what we know needs to be done now – and to leading the effort to find new solutions.

## POLITICAL ACCESS

Latinos are the fastest growing group in our country. They embody the values that built America: strong families, deep faith, and closely-knit communities. The Latino community embodies an American ideal -- out of many, we are one.

Today, we are one step closer to an America that's stronger at home and respected in the world, but we have a long way to go. We're here to fight for good-paying jobs that let American workers actually get ahead. We're here to make health care a right for all of our people. We're here to make this nation energy independent. Over 90% of Latino elected officials nationwide are Democrats, but we need more Latinos serving in our country's highest elected offices. The Latino community has a strong voice in the Democratic party.

## ECONOMIC POWER

One of our nation's most pressing civil rights battles involves ensuring equal access to good jobs. I have a plan to expand economic opportunities for Latinos. My economic plan will create millions of jobs in my first term. I will eliminate incentives for companies to ship jobs overseas, restore fiscal discipline to Washington, DC and work to create a workforce prepared to fill the next economy's jobs.

I will increase the minimum wage to \$7 an hour by 2007. Minimum wage today can no longer meet the needs of American families, and Latinos have been particularly hard-hit by its erosion. Over seven million Americans will benefit from this increase. Under my plan, millions will be raised out of poverty.

I will continue to lead the fight to preserve affirmative action in federal small business assistance and support fueling the growth of Hispanic-owned businesses by expanding the SBA 8(a) program. I will ensure that small businesses have the federal support they need to grow, by supporting and expanding loan programs to help more small business get off the ground. I will help micro-enterprises by expanding loans and equity for these smallest businesses, and will

# Takes the LULAC Challenge

bridge the gap between entrepreneurs' need for capital and traditional financing sources by increasing the federal government's venture capital investments.

## **IMMIGRANT RIGHTS**

I strongly support responsible reform of our immigration laws that honors our tradition as a nation of immigrants and that will make America stronger. I will offer a landmark reform bill in my first 100 days that will allow immigrants to earn legalization, encourage family reunification, offer a visa program with worker protections, and strengthen our border protections. By reforming our immigration laws, I will honor America's promise and strengthen America's economy and security.

I will fight for passage of the DREAM Act, the AgJobs legislation, and will work to restore benefits for legal immigrants.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

As Americans, we have the right to breathe unpolluted air, drink safe water, eat uncontaminated food, live in clean communities and enjoy our natural treasures. Over the last three years, we have seen these rights eroded. We have seen hard-won environmental gains rolled back, our air polluted and our water contaminated. I will enact a Conservation Covenant with America to ensure balanced protection for our public lands and adequate resources to enhance our national parks. I will protect our health by reducing dangerous air emissions, and I will restore America's waters to protect our precious limited water resources. Some of the most serious environmental problems facing this nation are problems of environmental injustice. I will fight to ensure the right for all to live in a clean and healthy environment, regardless of color, race, ethnicity, or income.

## **HOUSING**

For thousands of families the cost of housing is simply too great. I have been a strong proponent of preserving and expanding affordable housing and homeownership opportunities for the American people. I have

authored and co-authored numerous bills to encourage affordable housing, including the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act, The Community Development Tax Credit Act, The First-time Homebuyer Affordability Act, YouthBuild, and The Affordable Housing Preservation Act.

Unlike the Bush administration, which has cut critical federal programs that help Americans find affordable housing, I will work to ensure the continued vitality of these important initiatives. For example, the President's 2005 budget seeks to cut the Section 8 voucher program by more than \$1.6 billion and has proposed a significant change the section 8 voucher program in a manner that will substantially reduce the number of families eligible for federal housing assistance and increase cost of housing for those families who remain. The President's budget request also significantly cuts funding for critical housing programs such as HOPE VI, which helps low-income families move into improved housing and in many instances become homeowners.

## **HEALTH**

Latinos are more likely to be uninsured than people in any other racial or ethnic group. Over half of the Hispanic population went without health insurance the past couple of years. Soaring insurance costs threaten to drive the number even higher. I have a plan to provide access to health insurance to 27 million Americans, including all children. My plan also deals with the alarming increases in health care costs and the growing number of uninsured and will allow Americans to buy into the same health care plan that the President and Members of Congress have.

One in four Latino children lack any form of health insurance. I fought for the creation of the Children's Health Insurance Program in 1997, which marked the largest investment in children's health care in a generation. I will also fight to provide health care to legal immigrant children. I will improve language access programs in medical facilities and will ensure access to quality care

through greater disease management and prevention efforts.

We must also address the unjust disparities in our health care system—disparities often based on ethnicity and/or race. Latinos continue to live less healthy lives and die younger in America than other groups. Tremendous gains in science and medicine have benefited millions of our citizens, but too often they are out of reach for minorities. A Kerry-Edwards administration will work to eliminate these health disparities.

## **LEARNING ENGLISH**

I support full funding for bilingual education and will improve language access in medical facilities and all government programs. Under my immigration plan, I will expand opportunities to learn English and obtain civic education classes to help immigrants assume all of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

I worked with Latino leaders in Massachusetts and the Massachusetts delegation to oppose efforts to prohibit bilingual programs in the state.

## **WOMEN'S ISSUES**

Today, women are witnessing an unprecedented erosion of their basic rights. I will help balance work and family by greatly expanding after-school programs to serve 3.5 million children and fund a historic increase in the Child Care Tax Credit to meet the needs of overstretched parents.

On average, women still earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. I believe that we must make equal pay for equal work a reality, not a slogan. I will close the pay gap.

I will also Protect Women's Health And Right To Choose. As president, I will increase funding for breast and cervical cancer research and treatment, require insurance plans to cover contraception and fight for a meaningful Patients' Bill of Rights to guarantee women direct access to their OB/GYNs.