

Meg Whitman 'wows away' Latino crowd at San Jose campaign talk

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Body

Republican gubernatorial candidate **Meg Whitman** reached out to **Latino** business leaders at a **San Jose** luncheon Thursday, promising to create jobs, improve education and cut spending.

She didn't mention a touchier topic: immigration. But after her question-and-answer session with the Greater **San Jose** Hispanic Chamber of Commerce at a Santana Row restaurant, **Whitman** told the Mercury News she is "100 percent against amnesty," wants to crack down on employers who hire illegal immigrants and will eliminate "sanctuary cities" such as **San** Francisco that don't enforce federal immigration laws.

Still, **Whitman** said, she hopes her plans to improve education and the economy will appeal to a **Latino** population that is struggling with low graduation rates and higher joblessness and juvenile incarceration numbers.

With Latinos making up 1 in 5 California voters, the former eBay chief and Atherton resident considers the **Latino** vote "extraordinarily important."

"We cannot have an economic recovery in California without the **Latino** community involved," **Whitman** said.

It appears she made headway among those who listened to her Thursday.

"I've never, ever voted Republican, but I might," Marisa Escalera, a 30-year-old account executive at Spanish language Univision radio, said after **Whitman**'s speech. "I was **wowed away**."

Katherinne Garzon, a Campbell real estate agent, was so moved by **Whitman**'s **talk** that she signed up afterward to help build the "MEGaMujeres" division of the **Whitman campaign**'s "MEGaWomen" coalition. And Garzon is a registered Democrat.

She said she appreciates **Whitman**'s stand on education, which also affects real estate values, and she has friends who worked under **Whitman** at eBay and who speak highly of her.

"She's a strong leader, and I can't help but admire that," said Garzon, 39.

Whitman, who has already spent millions of her own to launch her **campaign**, has a wide lead over state Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner for the Republican nomination in June. Poizner has worked to position himself as tougher on illegal immigration than **Whitman**, though on Thursday, Hispanic Chamber CEO Carlos Figueroa said his group was more interested in the state's economy.

"Immigration is very dear to us, but it's not a focus," Figueroa said.

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Whitman, a New York native, arrived at the luncheon Thursday with her husband, Stanford neurosurgeon Griff Harsh IV, who listened to her speech, then joined her with friends afterward at an outdoor table.

In her speech to the business group, she touted her success at **San Jose**-based eBay, which she joined as a startup, and said she understands the dynamics of the small businesses that have sprung up because of the online auction house.

If she wins in November, she said, she will work to streamline regulations, pointing by way of example to the 21/2 year bureaucratic process it took to break ground on a new building for eBay subsidiary PayPal.

She said she also would work to eliminate certain business taxes, including the factory tax on manufacturing equipment that she said played a part in driving 600,000 manufacturing jobs out of California.

"I will be the chief sales officer," she said. "We will keep jobs."

On the other hand, she reiterated a pledge to eliminate 40,000 state jobs through attrition, returning California's public payroll to its size of five years ago.

Whitman said she favors giving local school districts block grants they can spend at their discretion and grading schools A to F on their performance. And she wants to increase the number of charter schools to give parents options if their school is failing, while paying "great teachers" more money.

Graphic

SAN JOSE, CA - MARCH 18: California Republican gubernatorial candidate and former eBay CEO **Meg Whitman** speaks to the Greater **San Jose** Hispanic Chamber of Commerce March 18, 2010 in **San Jose**, California. **Whitman** is currently **campaigning** ahead of the California Republican primary for governor. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

SAN JOSE, CA - MARCH 18: California Republican gubernatorial candidate and former eBay CEO **Meg Whitman** speaks to the Greater **San Jose** Hispanic Chamber of Commerce March 18, 2010 in **San Jose**, California. **Whitman** is currently **campaigning** ahead of the California Republican primary for governor. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

JOSE, CA - MARCH 18: California Republican gubernatorial candidate and former eBay CEO **Meg Whitman** smiles as she speaks to the Greater **San Jose** Hispanic Chamber of Commerce March 18, 2010 in **San Jose**, California. **Whitman** is currently **campaigning** ahead of the California Republican primary for governor. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

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