

Hispanic Businesses Get Out the Vote; Recruitment Campaigns, Immigration Debate Spur Latinos

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Body

Hispanic businesses and Spanish-language media, galvanized by the **immigration debates** of recent years, are sponsoring a bevy of civic engagement and **get-out-the-vote** efforts in the Washington area.

Some are part of larger national **campaigns**, **spurred** both by discussions of **immigration** policy and by Republican and Democratic interest in recruiting **Hispanic** voters. The majority of the efforts are nonpartisan and aimed at **getting** Hispanics to register and show up on Election Day.

The Ayuda **Business** Coalition runs one such **campaign**, focusing on Northern Virginia, particularly Prince William County. The nonprofit was formed last year by **business** owners opposed to the county's crackdown on illegal **immigration**, calling it bad for the local economy. It consists of more than 100 local, **Hispanic-owned businesses**.

Ayuda has set up registration booths at some members' grocery stores and at soccer matches. It also plans to conduct demonstrations on how to use **voting** machines and run spots on Spanish-language radio with the tagline, "Si no votas, no cuentas," or, "If you don't **vote**, you don't count."

José Marinay, the owner of a real estate settlement company in Annapolis, joined the Ayuda coalition last year when he saw sales at his Smart Choice Settlements office in Prince William County plummet. Marinay said he had donated to Democratic **campaigns** in the past but had not been involved in lobbying or voter mobilization efforts.

"**Immigration** was having a tremendous effect in Prince William County because nobody wanted to buy there and it was like they were shutting the door down on us," Marinay said. "There was nothing I could do, and I was trying to find a way to make a difference."

Both Republicans and Democrats are courting the **Hispanic vote**. The Service Employees International Union, which has endorsed Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), has been **getting** its members to register **Hispanic** voters by phone and on the streets. The Republican National **Hispanic** Assembly, on behalf of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.),

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plans to hold its own roundtable discussions for Hispanic business owners before the election, emphasizing tax issues. It also plans to host Hispanic happy hours.

"The Hispanic vote in Virginia could be pivotal," said Raul "Danny" Vargas, the founder of Herndon marketing company VARCom Solutions and chairman of the assembly. "What you will see is that there are a number of business leaders that are engaged in the political process, whereas they had not been before."

Hispanic media are also playing a stepped-up role, donating air time and advertising space to get Hispanic voters to the polls. Local newspapers Washington Hispanic and El Tiempo Latino, a publication of The Washington Post Co., are donating ad space to the campaign called "Ya Es Hora," or "It's Time," run by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials in Los Angeles.

That campaign, backed nationally by the Spanish-language media giant Univision, has been encouraging immigrants to gain citizenship and vote this year.

Alberto Avendaño, associate publisher and editor in chief of El Tiempo Latino, said the campaign was born out of the demonstrations by immigrants in 2006.

"This year, the community is really energized," Avendaño said.

The local affiliate of Telemundo is partnering with the nonprofit Voto Latino, which will run public service announcements and give political analysis, said Maria Teresa Petersen, director of the Voto Latino campaign.

The U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce plans to launch get-out-the-vote efforts in October to try to mobilize voters through its member chambers, including ones in the District, Rockville, Germantown and Herndon. It is the first time that the chamber, which has also stepped up its lobbying and policy efforts in the past two years, has attempted to mobilize voters, said David Ferreira, vice president of government affairs for the commerce.

"We decided to get involved in this election once we saw that comprehensive immigration [legislation] failed," he said. "We knew we needed to activate the Hispanic community."

Graphic

IMAGE; By Linda Davidson -- The Washington Post; Mirna Urias mans a phone for the Service Employees International Union's push to get Hispanics to register to vote. Other local groups are making similar efforts.

IMAGE; By Linda Davidson -- The Washington Post; Christian Gonzalez, right, recruited Claudia Amurrio to Barack Obama's campaign. Volunteer efforts targeting Hispanic voters are on the rise.

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