

WASHINGTON, DC – Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), Vice Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, delivered a speech today on the growing importance of the Latino community in our economy and democracy. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

**“Latinos have always been a part of America’s story. From the time of the colonies... strike that... from before the first colony and the formation of our union, through westward expansion and the industrialization of our nation, through our recovery from the Great Depression and as leaders and partners in the struggle for civil rights we’ve been there, done that. □**

**“Latinos have done their part in every American military conflict going back to the Revolution. From General Bernardo de Galvez who covered General George Washington’s southern flank to Jose Gutierrez, the first American casualty, I believe, in the Iraq War who came to America as an undocumented orphan from Guatemala.□**

**“Latinos have always been a part of America’s fabric, but today, at the beginning of the 21st century, we enter an era where we aren’t simply a part of the history, but are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping this great nation’s history for today and tomorrow.**

**“The 2010 Census confirmed what many of us already felt and understood: Latinos and other communities of color will be an ever larger part of drawing the blueprint for the next iteration of America and American greatness.□**

**“Today, in 2012, we see an America where minorities account for more than half of her births, where people increasingly identify as multicultural, and where the geographies of communities of color aren’t just limited to major metropolitan and urban settings. These communities are the cornerstones of today’s America; an America that is recovering from a recession and rebuilding the American Dream.**

**“Latinos across the spectrum are at the forefront of these realities, whether they are new immigrants, new Americans, or need a new hand to count the family generations. Over the last decade, from 2000 to 2010, the Latino population grew from 35.3 million to 50.5 million, accounting for more than half of the nation’s population growth and placing Latinos at 16 percent of our total population. And there is a growing self-awareness among our communities that more than ever, we matter to the America of today and tomorrow.”**

**“And these facts come with an expectation that our elected leaders and policymakers will be responsive to the hopes, the dreams and aspirations of today’s America. We know where we want to go but it appears that too many politicians in this town aren’t listening.”**

**“Given the demographics of today and what we know about the growing participation of Latinos in our democracy, the indifference to the hearts and minds of America’s Latinos is a risky space to occupy in both the short and long term. When you look at the numbers it’s clear that Latinos are at the beginning of a long arc and evolution as key decision-makers. Being on the wrong side of Latinos is tantamount to being on the wrong side of history.”**

**“Yet, even with this mounting evidence, there have been occasions of glaring indifference and confrontational reaction to the growing presence and prominence of the Latino community. A lack of understanding of the Latino community leaves our politics and public institutions poorer.”**

**“Today’s panelists are going to dig deeper into understanding the American of Latino descent. But as a Latino myself, and the son of immigrants, who grew up in California and represents the great city of Los Angeles, one of the largest communities of Latinos in the U.S., there are a few things that I think are important to keep in mind.”**

**“As Latinos, we have more attributes that unite us than divide us. There are, however, important differences. Differences in the Latino community exist in sharp contrasts as well as subtle shades and cut across nationality, ethnicity, race, class, income, faith, geography, generations and even language. These differences are overshadowed, in my**

belief, by our core beliefs and values largely rooted in our multi-generational families and personal histories linked to immigration and the pursuit of the American Dream.

“When I look at my own family and the aspirations of my parents, my own hopes and the dreams of my children, I touch and feel the story of millions of America’s Latinos.

“My parents worked wherever and whenever they could to literally build a home and brighter future for their four children. And it wasn’t easy. In those days, there were still businesses that hung signs in their storefront windows that read, “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed.” This isn’t an anomaly in our history. When the Irish emigrated to America, they were confronted by “No Irish Need Apply” signs. And the same can be said for nearly every wave of immigrants -- none of this defeated the determination of our newcomers to make it in America.□

“The story of my parents, and our community, is no different. My father worked every job he could find. He shined shoes at the age of six. He picked most every crop you could eat and cleaned the hulls of ships in the Los Angeles harbor. He fixed the brakes on Southern Pacific Railroad cars and canned tomatoes for Campbell’s Soup. And he laid the pipe, poured the concrete, and lifted the manholes for the California road and highway system that we still use today.

“My mother, well, at the age of 19, she became a newlywed and a newcomer to America. No money, no family, no English. But, she had faith, blazing hands on a manual typewriter and night school English classes. On her shoulders rested the game plan for launching four children to a place where no man or woman, at least in this family, had gone before: college. □

“She did double duty, working in and out of the house. She took the couple’s meager earnings, navigated through the bills and the hard times, and, well... mission accomplished, and with a bonus: today, Maria Teresa Becerra’s magic and control of the purse guaranteed my father and her more annual income in retirement than they ever earned together while working full time.□

“There’s a saying in Spanish: lo que bien empieza, bien termina – what begins well, ends

well. My mother began with nothing, but from the start she invested in her family. That I will never forget.

“In America, work ethic and dedication pay off, right? I was the first in my family to receive a Bachelor’s degree. I stayed on at Stanford and earned my law degree. By 1992, I was elected to Congress. And just a few short years later, my mother and father – who couldn’t walk into certain restaurants – were standing by my side with the President of the United States.□

“Only in America is a story like that possible. And it’s possible, not just for one community or another, but for all Americans, regardless of who they are, where they come from or what they do for a living. If you work hard and play by the rules, the American Dream will be within your reach. I believe it, I live it, I can say it in two languages, and I’m here to keep it alive. □

“Understanding, addressing and delivering for Latinos is a linchpin for elected leaders invested in America’s success for tomorrow and longer term. But that investment must be more than token; it must be an investment in opportunities for Latinos as full participants at every level of society, from homes to schools to the workforce and beyond. □

“And that means addressing social issues like immigration, healthcare and the economy in a meaningful and respectful way that incorporates Latino values and takes into account the unique perspectives with which Latinos view the world and this country.□

“In today’s atmosphere of extreme rhetoric, elected leaders who entrench themselves in absolutes – whether about who they are or who they think others are – those leaders are going to be on the losing end with Latinos.□

“When I hear elected representatives dehumanizing the undocumented or devaluing low-wage immigrant workers or those with little education, I hear them arguing against allowing Americans like my mother and father to enter this country to build America and achieve their dream. When I hear these politicians arguing for limiting the ability of immigrant families to be reunited with their loved ones, I hear them arguing against my

**father's ability to bring my mother to this country from Mexico. I hear them devaluing the collective prosperity that immigrants and native-born Americans have created together over the last two centuries.**

**"I'm not alone in that sentiment. Polling and research tell us that Latinos' instinctual and emotional reactions to how leaders discuss immigration impacts how they hear their leaders on other top-tier issues such as healthcare, education and the economy. The panelists here today will speak to that more profoundly. But it shouldn't take a rocket scientist to interpret the demographic changes occurring in our country and the extreme rhetoric on issues like immigration and healthcare to recognize that those who fail to change their words and deeds towards Latinos do so at their own peril."**

**"In the weeks and months ahead, this reality is going to become more apparent, especially in states such as Florida, Nevada, Virginia, Arizona, New York, Texas, North Carolina, California, New Mexico, Illinois and Colorado, just to name a few. And when we look at the 2000 and 2010 census data and the results from the 2008 and 2012 elections, it's going to paint a very clear picture that the trends are irreversible."**

**"Latino presence and influence are not going away or diminishing over the next several decades. Indeed, they are a part of America's DNA. We know that American success requires Latino engagement and support. But our leaders cannot count on their support without meaningful and authentic investment now and for the long term."**

**"Democratic leaders have embraced that investment in Latinos and immigrants—under the leadership of President Obama and Nancy Pelosi, we passed the DREAM Act in the House of Representatives in December 2010 and are dedicated to comprehensive immigration reform. Under that same leadership we passed the Affordable Care Act, reforming a dysfunctional health care system and guaranteeing greater access to health coverage for more than 9 million Latinos and all Americans. "**

**"With the bedrock belief that a rising tide lifts all boats, the Democratic agenda to rebuild America's middle class is leveling the playing field for Latinos and other communities of color to have a shot at better jobs and earning a living wage in America."**

**“Lo que bien empieza, bien termina! Those who understand and embrace Latinos and invest in them today for the future are going to end well. Those who have not started or invested well with Latinos and don’t change their course; well... you’d better go talk to my mother.”**