

Forum set to delve into perspective of Hispanic Arizonans

The Arizona Republic
 "Viewpoints"
 Page V3
 October 12, 2008

What are the issues that matter most to Arizona Latinos?

It may come as a surprise to some that what Latinos care about isn't all that different from what matters to Arizonans in general.

Latinos are concerned about the economy, health care, taxes, education, transportation, local crime, national security, etc.

People's life experience, of course, shapes their perspective. As such, there is such a thing as a Latino perspective. That perspective,



JAMES E. GARCIA
 LATINO
 ACTIVIST

however, is hardly monolithic. The Latino community's social, cultural and political views run the gamut. We're rich, poor and middle class. We're conservative, liberal and centrist. We're U.S.-born and foreign-born.

In short, the Latino perspective is diverse.

That perspective takes center stage when the Arizona Latino Research Enterprise (ALRE) hosts its fourth annual Latino Town Hall at the Wyndham in downtown Phoenix on Friday and Saturday. The event is titled "Politics. Purpose. Progress."

Conference panels will feature experts on civil rights, U.S.-Mexican relations, Arizona politics, the upcoming legislative session and the state's evolving education policy.

On Friday, John Trasviña, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, will kick off the conference with a wide-ranging speech on the state of civil rights across the nation.

Trasviña then joins a panel discussion with Mesa Police Chief George Gascón and Arizona State University law Professor Evelyn Cruz. The panelists will address issues surrounding stepped-up efforts at the lo-

cal, state and federal level to enforce U.S. immigration law.

The impact of the November election on U.S. relations is the focus of a panel featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Rick Rodriguez, who is the Carnegie fellow at ASU's Cronkite School of Journalism, and Prospero Ibarra, a deputy in Sonora's legislature. Journalist Howard Fisher and political consultant Jaime Molera are among those participating in a discussion about state's continuing budget crisis, the upcoming legislative session and the coming election.

Saturday's discussions center on a recently announced initiative sponsored by ALRE and ASU. Professor Carlos Velez Ibanez, a noted anthropologist, is directing a yearlong project that will culminate in a wide-ranging report called "The State of Hispanic Arizona".

According to Velez Ibanez, the first-of-its-kind study is intended to document "the heterogeneity and complexity of the (Latino) population" with an eye toward the state's future.

Ultimately, the report, like ALRE's annual town halls, should help to inform the general public about the increasingly vital role Latinos play in Arizona.

Arizona's Latino population is growing, as is the community's influence on public policy.

The question of how the Latino community wields its influence will greatly depend on how effectively it is able to present its perspective to the wider community.

The ability of the Latino community to meet that goal is in the interest of all Arizonans.

James E. Garcia is a research fellow at ASU Center for Community Development and Civil Rights. For more information about the 2008 ALRE Town Hall, visit alre.org.