**The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)**

**NALEO Responds to President Barack Obama’s**

**2014 State of the Union Address**

Organization calls on Congress and President to work together to advance meaningful

immigration reform, job creation and equal voting rights access.

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) issued the following statement regarding President Barack Obama’s State of the Union address tonight:

“We applaud the President for outlining his legislative plan for ensuring everyone has the ‘opportunity to succeed’ in this country if you ‘work hard and take responsibility’. Following the Great Recession, the Latino community has found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet--experiencing higher rates of unemployment, foreclosure, and loss of household wealth. By implementing policies that grow the economy, spur job creation and make college more accessible for all Americans, more Latinos will be able to pursue their piece of the American Dream, resulting in a more skilled work force and an expanded middle class.

“We urge Congress and the President to work together on bipartisan measures, such as early learning and college readiness programs that will foster educational and economic opportunity for this increasingly significant sector of the population and all Americans in the coming year.

“We were also pleased the President expressed a renewed commitment to making comprehensive immigration reform a reality in 2014. With the Republican Leadership expected to release their principles on immigration reform in the coming days, we encourage the President and Congress to build on the common ground that has been forged around this important issue. As the President mentioned, an individual’s ability to succeed should be determined by ‘the strength of our work ethic and the scope of our dream’, not ‘on accident of birth’. These words ring true for the millions of immigrants living in the shadows today, especially those who were brought here as children through no fault of their own.

“Immigrants like Cristian Avila, a DREAMer and State of the Union guest of the First Lady tonight, continue to make significant contributions to their communities each and every day while they wait for the President and Congress to fix our nation’s broken immigration system once and for all. Passing a commonsense immigration reform bill that fully integrates immigrants into our nation’s rich civic life and provides a pathway to citizenship, will unite families and strengthen our borders, and will grow our economy and shrink our deficits by almost $1 trillion in the next two decades. Given the enormous economic and civic benefits at stake for our nation and millions of immigrants, the time has never been more important for the President and Congress to work in a cooperative and swift manner to bring our immigration system into the 21st century by passing bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform that upholds the values of this great nation.

“We praise the President for also acknowledging the importance of protecting the rights of every voter in this country. The right to vote is one of the most precious rights afforded to us, and we were pleased to see both the President and Congress take bipartisan steps to ensure equal access to the ballot box through the bicameral introduction of the Voting Rights Act Amendment (VRAA) legislation and the release of recommendations from the Presidential Commission on Election Administration in recent weeks. While the VRAA bill marks significant progress on this issue, we believe there is room for improvement. We will continue to work with Congress to address this concern through the addition of a strong and forward looking preclearance provision that will protect the Latino electorate and those voters most vulnerable to uneven treatment. With Election 2014 on the horizon and the Voting Rights Act now missing a crucial tool in combatting discriminatory practices post-Shelby County, it is critical that Members of Congress take swift action to ensure equal voting rights for all.

“Our constituency of more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide stands ready to work side-by-side with the President, his Administration and the Congress on policies and legislation that aim to restore ‘equal opportunity for all’, spur job creation, increase college access, fix the nation’s broken immigration system and protect the rights of all voters. Working together across party lines to ensure everyone has the ‘opportunity to succeed’, we are confident that we can make the strides necessary to ensure that our political system and the American dream remain accessible for Latinos and all Americans in the years to come.”

**About NALEO**

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials is the leadership organization of the nation’s more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials.

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