

Latino Communities Want to Take Action on Climate Change

OCTOBER 20, 2016 BY LIZETTE ESCOBEDO 0 COMMENTS



Latino leaders gathered in Washington, D.C. recently for the [National Latino Climate Leadership Forum](#) to discuss how to best tackle environmental issues impacting Latinos.

As I've mentioned in [my previous posts](#), low-income communities of color have been most negatively affected by climate change and environmental racism. Bringing Latino leaders into the conversation is a step in the right direction. And while it will take time to sort through the solutions, I find the possibilities exciting and hopeful.

Pollution, Climate Change, and Health

One of the A panel discussions focused on moving beyond symbolic action and into strategic planning. It is vital that we move beyond producing declarations of support, commitment letters and white papers on why environmental issues matter to Latinos. Pulling together an implementation plan about how we can combat pollution, climate change, and increase accessibility to clean air and water is needed for the health of our families now and in the future.

At the forum, [ecoAmerica](#) and [Lake Research Partners](#) presented the findings of their Latino climate messaging study, which again confirmed that climate change is a key issue for Latinos. For example:

- 84% of Latinos sampled are concerned about climate change
- 84% of Latinos are ready to take action
- Over 90% of Latinos support climate action at every level and sector
- 88% of Latinos support government intervention to limit pollution

As highlighted in my piece, [For Latinos, Climate Change is a High Priority](#), Latinos are, and have always been, on board. Now we need to focus on taking action.

Partnering With the Latino Community

In order to forge diverse partnerships between Latinos and the environmental community, we need to educate and provide resources to existing organizations. Many of these Latino organizations do not

traditionally tackle environmental issues. So, this will require detailed coordination, community mapping, and collaborative funding.

We must also keep in mind the importance of bringing local and state governments into the conversation. They are a key to ensuring that we can institutionalize practices that give communities easy access to information.

Health Professionals, Business Leaders, Labor Leaders, and Mothers

As discussed in the forum, diversifying and broadening partnerships to tackle the issues at all levels is key. The panel discussions included conversations about reaching out to policy makers, health professionals, ethnic media, business leaders, women, and mothers, among others. However, I would also add that labor leaders and labor organizations could also play an important role in these conversations.

For example, this year one of the largest unions in the country, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), [passed a resolution](#) to fight for environmental and climate justice. The devastating effects of pollution and climate change have directly impacted many of their members. A SEIU member and homeware worker from Central Valley, CA, Martha Valladares, [shared the challenges of not having access to clean air or clean water](#) – resulting in her daughter’s asthma.

Environmental Justice Is a Fight for Survival

The fight for environmental justice has moved from a push for sustainability to a fight for survival. During the forum, the role of educating local policy makers was highlighted. However, we must also think about how we utilize the political mechanisms of organizations. For example, we need to know how to access organizations that allow us to [advocate and endorse climate candidates](#).

We must also hold policy makers at all levels of government accountable – calling out those who stagnate, oppose, deny or are absent on key bills that support Latino priorities. Latino voters are not only a key voting bloc in federal elections; they are also key in local elections. In communities that are majority Latino, forcing candidates to think about proactive ways to play a leadership role on policies that focus on the environment can help keep our families healthy.

Latinos understand why protecting and saving the environment is important. We understand that it is our moral responsibility. We understand it is our challenge to make sure everyone in our community understands that pollution is toxic and it directly affects the health of our families. We also understand that environmental justice is a fight for survival that must be fought for our children and the planet.

This post was originally published on the [Moms Clean Air Force blog](#). Learn more about [Lizette Escobedo](#) [here](#).