

La Nueva Mayoría

By David R. Jones



The Job Crisis

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A total of 36 percent of Latino households in New York City reported a lost job or reduced hours and/or wages in the past year. This is data from the latest Community Service Society annual survey of New Yorkers, "The Unheard Third 2011."

The survey sought feedback from low-income New Yorkers, including low-income Latinos, with a focus on their views and opinions regarding job benefits, hardships, fears about the economy, and priorities for the next mayoral election. The survey was conducted for CSS by Lake Research in July 2011 with 1,419 New Yorkers age 18 and older.

Low-income Latinos were hard hit by recession. In fact, half of low-income Latinos worry most or all of the time their income will not be enough to pay the bills. Currently, about 28 percent of the city's Latino population is living in poverty – more than any other racial or ethnic group. That's about 644,000 people, more than 40 percent of the total number of the city's poor.

Those Latino New Yorkers who are employed often have fewer workplace benefits compared to low-income workers overall. While 36 percent of all low-income workers report having paid sick leave on the job, only 24 percent of Latino workers do. Similarly, only 29 percent of Latino workers report having health insurance compared to 37 percent of all low-income workers.

Half of low-income Latino respondents reported experiencing three or more hardships in the past year. These included being without health coverage (30%), not filling a prescription because of lack of money or insurance (29%), and falling behind in rent or mortgage payments (28%). In addition, one in five often skipped meals because of the lack of money to buy food.

Jobs are seen as the answer to the economic situation of low-income Latinos. Latinos say that job creation (57%) is the most important issue in the upcoming mayoral race, with education (29%) a distant second, followed by housing for lower-income groups (21%).

Despite intense worries about jobs and putting jobs at top of political agenda, Latinos do not think more giveaways to business is the way to create more jobs. Only 12 percent agree that the next mayor should lower taxes and cut regulations on businesses, while 66 percent say that we need a mayor who supports policies that help working families – affordable housing, well funded public schools, and better benefits for workers.

A solid majority (64%) of Latinos are willing to pay more taxes for programs that improve high school graduation rates. Sixty-two percent also are willing to pay more taxes for programs that give dropouts a chance to earn a high school diploma or GED. The high school retention rate for Latino males is just over 50 percent (52%) compared to 78 percent for Asian males and 75 percent for white males.

The city needs a mayor who will promote policies that create more jobs – such as public works on the city’s crumbling infrastructure. And we need to give people the skills to fill those jobs. That means targeting new entrants to the labor force and the long-term jobless with skills training, better access to the GED, and apprenticeship programs geared to jobs in expanding sectors of the economy.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 165 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.