

Latina Lista

a viewpoint on anything and everything from a Latina perspective

LATINA LISTA

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Unsettled case of Hispanic farmers underscores lack of DC Latino leadership and concern from Obama

After ten years, tomorrow should have been the day of reckoning at the Supreme Court for a group of Hispanic farmers who filed a lawsuit against the USDA for systematically denying them needed loans and credits to sustain their farms, while granting those same loans to white farmers.

Though the Supreme Court ruled last month that they would not hear their case, they did schedule tomorrow to be the day to decide if the farmers could still argue their case as a group or have to go one-by-one against the courts. Now, a source tells Latina Lista that the review has been pushed back to February 12 due to bad weather arriving tomorrow on the East Coast.

Yet, for a group of people who have waited ten years, another week isn't going to make a difference, especially since their meeting with the Supreme Court doesn't bring closure to their case, but only prolongs it further.

Over the last ten years, some of the farmers have died, had strokes or been so heartbroken over losing their family farms due to this admitted discrimination by the USDA that family members are quickly losing faith in this administration and Latino leadership.

The few reporters who have picked up this story and interviewed the farmers seem to be asked the same questions by these farmers and their families: Why is it OK to treat us like this?

What is really twisted about this situation is that a group of black farmers with the very same complaint got their case settled with more than a one billion dollar payout. Yet, no acknowledgement of the Hispanic farmers' suit has been made by the Obama Administration even though Sen. Menendez made an eloquent appeal on the Senate floor on their behalf in November and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus sent a letter to the President.

But obviously that is not enough. A source tells Latina Lista that the reason why the black farmers were able to get their case resolved was because the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) fought relentlessly on their behalf.

Aside from sending one letter to the President, one letter to Attorney General Eric Holder and one letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, asking that the Hispanic farmers' concerns be addressed, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) has not publicly done anything since May 14, 2009. From what can be seen, they have not duplicated the efforts of their CBC colleagues. The question must be asked, "Why?"

At a time when the national Latino community needs definite leadership in Washington, this is a perfect opportunity to fight on behalf of some of the most deserving people who have blatantly been victimized by the federal government, and yet CHC members are satisfied with sending 3 letters?

I am sure it will be said that they are doing things behind-the-scenes, but if that were true, due to the sad state these Hispanic farmers now find themselves in, it would have to be said that our HCC is pretty ineffective when it comes to influence in DC.

In the last few weeks, it has been heartening to see LULAC take a more aggressive stance in trying to mobilize their members to make phone calls and sign petitions on behalf of these farmers but the bottom line is that Latino leadership is lacking in DC - where we need it the most.

If the current Latino leadership cannot even use their influence to get a settlement for these Hispanic farmers in such an

open-and-shut case then there's no hope for leadership from among this group when it comes to immigration reform.

That's not just sad but very scary because the lives of too many Latinos hang in the balance -- starting with these Hispanic farmers who deserve more from those who claim to be on their side.

To understand and hear the anguish this case has caused, listen to an interview done by San Antonio reporter Jessie Degollado of station KSAT where Modesta Salazar asks a poignant question that deserves an answer.

It's time the Latino leadership in Washington answered to all these farmers.

The following is another recent story done on the Hispanic farmers' plight by Dallas Belo station WFAA. It leaves one to ask where is Hispanic media in covering this story as well?

Video is included.