



Senator Robert Menendez calls for Equal Justice for Hispanic Farmers

10,000 petitions Sent to White House Demanding Equal treatment for Hispanic Farmers

Washington, DC, November 19, 2010...Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) took to the Senate Floor Wednesday afternoon to demand an end to decades of discrimination against Hispanic and women farmers in the administration of USDA's farm credit and non-credit farm benefit programs. He also expressed his support for parity with the settlement of the first black farmers' lawsuit in the treatment of Hispanic and women farmers in any settlement of their claims against the Government. The Senator cautioned that the current Government- proposed settlement is, itself, discriminatory as it treats different minority farmer-groups who have suffered identical discrimination at the hands of USDA, in vastly different ways.

"I rise so that all the victims of discrimination in this case are treated equally, fairly and are adequately compensated for the damages they suffered regardless of their race or gender."

Menendez referred to a recent settlement from the government offering Hispanic farmers some undefined part of \$1.33 billion to be shared with female farmers despite the fact that Hispanic and female farmers outnumber black farmers by at least 12 to 1 and as much as 27 to 1. Hispanic farmers alone outnumber black farmers by nearly 2 to 1.

Ten years ago, in a case known as Pigford I, black farmers received a billion dollars in damages and other relief to settle claims of discrimination. Significantly, in that case there was a two-track claims resolution process (\$50,000 for Track A claimants and no limit on the damages that could be proved by Track B claimants) and no arbitrary cap on total damages. Currently, there is legislation pending in Congress to authorize another \$1.25 Billion for "late filer" black farmers.

Native American farmers were offered more than \$760 Million recently to settle their claims. Hispanic and Women farmers outnumber Native American farmers by at least 10 to 1 and as much as 19 to 1.

"There appears to be some contradiction between the proposal given to these groups and the declared objectives of providing parity among the different groups who suffer discrimination," the Senator told his colleagues. "The only thing that could be worse than the original discrimination is if (the Government) were to treat the victims of that discrimination differently based on their race, ethnicity or gender. Justice for one cannot masquerade as justice for all."

The Senator also criticized the suggested method for administering Hispanic and women farmers' claims, calling it highly discriminatory, arbitrary and needlessly complicated.

Shortly after the Senator delivered his remarks more than 10,000 petitions were delivered to the White House. These petitions call for the Administration to settle the Garcia lawsuit, expeditiously, in a fair and equitable manner

In his closing remarks, Senator Menendez acknowledged that the current Administration was trying to right an injustice, but added, "I don't think, nor can I accept, that you can dispense justice piecemeal, or that you can treat victims similarly situated, almost identically situated and harmed, with justice for some and not for all. We need to make this right. We need to make the victims whole."

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For more information on the Garcia v. Vilsack suit pls visit

<http://www.garciaclassaction.org>

For Senator Menendez's remarks pls visit

<http://www.youtube.com/user/GarciaFarmersVsUSDA>

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