



## Commentary

### ***Bola de Ladrones: Federal and State Budget Crises***

*Bola de ladrones* (ball of thieves) is where my father would put the central responsibility for the fiscal mess we are in. The national and state fiscal messes we are in makes one want to cry. The so-called middle class is dwindling and facing a serious threat to its existence (phantom at best). Latinos, people of color and the poor are at the forefront of this mess bearing a disproportionate amount of threat to their *bienestar* (well-being); thereby, impeding their productive citizenry. Greed, dishonesty, and general lack of a moral compass are the central culprits for this mess. We have rationalized away basic values and not held anyone accountable - politicians, corporations, and wealthy unethical individuals.

The results are disproportionate net taxation and subsidies; allocation of funds for social and health programs often structured so that this results weighted more toward corporate profits than to equitable access or effectiveness (e.g., Medicare Prescription Drug Program); unwarranted involvement in wars, trillion-dollar deficits, and a rich-poor wealth gap higher than any time in the history of our country.

I have no doubt Latinos will survive the draconian cuts in federal and state budgets, but who wants to survive as opposed to having sustained economic and health security? The negative impacts of proposed cuts will include more barriers to educational opportunities, limiting access to quality health care, and high unemployment which together will contribute to increasing the number of Latinos among those in poverty. The usage of the immigration as a wedge issue further exacerbates and undermines Latino *bienestar* (well-being), and awareness of our contributions to our country and society at-large.

It reminds me of when I was poor and didn't know it! I worked from dawn to dusk in the South Texas cotton fields, came back to our 10 by 10 feet living quarters (8 family members), drank polluted Texas 'oil' contaminated water, bathed in our community shower; slept outside in the company of mosquito's, and had the added opportunity to experience racism. Other than cheap labor, these conditions did not support an opportunity and equal pathway to the "American Dream". Nonetheless, with help from the GI Bill and a Federal Education Program I managed to get a college education, a good job, and better pay with benefits. The result has been exponential growth in productivity and taxes I have contributed to my country, state, and local government. To say nothing about what I have been able to do for my family that my parents weren't in a position to provide.

To be clear, my problem in those years was not the work, it was the poor pay (do the math, 600 pounds cotton-picked/day @ \$1.25), and no benefits. Latino's, particularly Mexican Americans whom I am and more familiar with are resilient, hardworking, and generally conservative about God, country and family. They ask for little from government or the private sector other than fairness. I for one get mad at Mexican Americans because on the whole they have way too much integrity and they don't get mad enough when to-often fairness goes out the window; like NOW with *ladrones* multiplying like flies. And, yes I admit that we go over-board to 'assimilate'

which is why we are now more ‘obese’ and will live shorter-lives. We need to look toward retaining more of our cultural roots – *cultura cura* (culture cures). Sorry, I digress, this is another topic.

We must be arguing and raising our voice for fairness and integrity in government and the private sector. We must make demands like the Tea Party but not from narrow ideological and often unsupported biased reasons; e.g., get rid of government programs including things like ‘ObamaCare’, keep supporting unneeded billion-dollar defense weaponry, eliminating environmental safety protections, and let the private free-market work unabated by limiting their taxes and only minimal regulations.

Our message must, instead, be fairness, integrity and accountability in spite of the fact that we don’t have the financial backing of ‘rich’ ideologues that the Tea Party and other super-right groups have. The message is about shared prosperity and responsible and effective government. We must measure the quality of all of our public officials by how they voted. Do their votes help create job opportunities – above minimum wage and good benefits please? Do they support leaving the doors open to affordable education and access to quality health care is fair and equitable for everyone? Do we demand that we have policies and actions where our neighborhood, community and country are environmentally safe for our families and neighbors to thrive? Finally, do they support national immigration laws that are fair, humane, legally upheld, and meets the needs of our country?

It easy to blow-off getting involved to make your voice heard. Most of us don’t like getting involved in ‘politics’. It’s much easier to point a finger and blame the supposed ‘welfare queen’ we saw today and not take-on the corporate or public officials. The reality is that laws which affect our lives in many different ways are made through a messy democratic political process.

We’re indigenous and productive Americans. We have helped make America great, and we must continue to assert influencing it future. We must demand policies that create opportunities and empower its citizens. And, let’s make sure our voices include calls for accountability and lots of jail-time for the *ladrones* instead of rationalizing their unethical criminal behaviors.