



Latino Legislators Call For End of Jones Act, Cannabis Decriminalization, Gun Safety in Landmark Resolutions

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The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) took bold stances on issues that affect the Latino community, and for the first time waded into the gun safety issue, calling for universal background checks and other important gun reform measures in one of a series of resolutions approved by the group at its 16th Annual Summit, which was held in San Diego this weekend. NHCSL also passed a resolution calling for the repeal of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, commonly known as the Jones Act, which imposes higher prices on consumers as well as outdated and anti-competitive requirements that burden US citizens in non-contiguous jurisdictions, such as Alaska, Puerto Rico, and others.

In addition, NHCSL ratified a resolution its Executive Committee approved last year, which calls on the federal government to legalize the use of cannabis and allow states to determine whether to regulate its use for medicinal or recreational purposes. The text of the resolution can be found [HERE](#).

“I am proud that we have a diverse group of legislators, from both sides of the aisle, that can come together in a civil debate and provide a voice for our community in the halls of power. Our organization took a stand on a variety of issues that impact our community, and we will continue to defend them and speak out about the important issues of the day, no matter how controversial or sensitive. Whether it’s protecting the 2020 Census from an unconstitutional citizenship question, making sure every family that was separated at the border is reunited, or calling for fair treatment for every US citizen who is the victim of a natural disaster, NHCSL will continue to be at the forefront of Latino issues at the national and state levels,” NHCSL President, Senator Carmelo Ríos (PR) said. “I also want to thank my fellow chairs of the Quad Caucus of Legislators of Color who came to our summit and, for the first time outside the Quad, the four of us stood together for a common purpose: to unite as one when it comes to the issues we all care about. That is why my sincerest gracias go out to Rep. Gregory Porter (IN), Chair of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCLS); Sen. Benny Shendo (NM), Chair of the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators (NCNASL); and Rep. Kyle Yamashita (HI), Chair of the National Asian Pacific American Caucus of State Legislators (NAPACSL) for attending our summit and for their partnership for all of our communities.”

New Jersey Senator Nellie Pou, who co-sponsored the resolution calling for the repeal of the Jones Act along with Pennsylvania Representative Ángel Cruz, said: “The Jones Act was enacted

a century ago to protect the American maritime industry. Today, experts agree that the statute is harmful to that very same industry due to its anti-competitive restrictions, which harms consumers; especially in Puerto Rico, Alaska, and other jurisdictions. I am a champion of working families and the unions that represent them. On this issue, however, there's little evidence to support the theory that repealing the Jones Act would lead to massive job loss. In fact, the competition spurred by a Jones Act repeal would likely create more business for US ports as a result, which would be a boon, not only for the economy, but also for the environment, as transporting goods through sea vessels is the most climate-friendly method of mass transportation.”

Colin Grabow, Policy Analyst at the CATO Institute, said: “I'd like to commend the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators for their recent passage of a resolution calling for the Jones Act's repeal. Unlike many in Washington, these legislators recognize both the economic burden this archaic law places upon their constituents and the thin nature of its national security justification.”

“The Jones Act's harm to consumers is no mere speculation. The oligopoly entrenched by a handful of shipping companies in Puerto Rico pleaded guilty to federal crimes and paid with jail time and fines for fixing prices and other illegal behavior, which cost consumers millions of dollars. It is high time that Congress pays attention to the words of the late Senator John McCain, when he introduced a bill (S. 1561) to repeal the Jones Act: ‘the Jones Act, [is] an archaic and burdensome law that hinders free trade, stifles the economy, and ultimately harms consumers.’ Let's heed Senator McCain's words and get rid of this harmful law,” Sen. Pou added.

Maryland Delegate Joselyn Peña-Melnyk, who took the lead on two of the thorniest issues discussed at the Summit and was also bestowed the John S. Martínez Legislator of the Year Award, said: “The lack of common-sense gun safety and cannabis decriminalization laws have had a particularly deleterious effect on communities of color, including Hispanics. Cannabis laws were originally conceived in a prejudiced manner, using the term ‘marijuana’ to emphasize the anti-Latino biases of the time. The criminalization of cannabis has resulted in the ruining of many young Latino's lives and it's time to start righting these wrongs. That is why we also came out in support for meaningful gun safety and reform. When 54,000 Latinos have died since 1999 due to gun violence, we need to act to protect our families from the scourge of needless gun-related deaths. I am proud that NHCSL stood up on these issues and said, ¡basta ya!”

During the summit, Latino state legislators from across the country convened in San Diego to focus on key priorities for Latino families. The summit gathered senior elected officials, state legislators, diplomats, corporate executives, community advocates, and policymakers to address some of the issues impacting Latino voters. Attendees participated in panels to discuss a wide variety of issues, such as online privacy, gun safety, sickle cell disease, the Jones Act, cannabis, and other pressing issues. NHCSL approved resolutions on some of these topics, as well as: calling for a national holiday for Election Day and election reform, measures to address the opioid crisis, urging states to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), recommending that states adopt required sex education curricula, including teaching about sexual consent, among others.