

# The Coronado Project

Advocating a new Democratic electoral strategy that explores the voting potential of Hispanics in the Southwest, the Midwest and the South.

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To: Interested Parties

RE: Why Menendez

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At first blush, Gov.-elect Jon Corzine's decision on whom to appoint to the seat he will relinquish in the U.S. Senate when he is sworn in as New Jersey's governor should be driven first and foremost by local political considerations. After Gov. Codey withdrew last week, the decision became more embroiled in the shifting vagaries of the state's competitive politics.

A primary consideration is who can best hold the seat in next year's election against what is expected to be a strong Republican candidate. Democrats throughout the country are interested in whom Corzine selects because of the party's drive to recapture control of the Senate next year, when Corzine's successor will run for a full six-year term.

In some recent polls, Congressman Bob Menendez has proven to be the strongest Democrat against the expected Republican candidate. But the importance of a Menendez candidacy stretches beyond New Jersey.

Whether Corzine and the national Democratic leadership can appreciate the opportunity that Menendez presents them will reveal if Democrats understand how to use such openings to rally the Hispanic vote to the Democratic camp.

Choosing Menendez to fill his post, Corzine can instantly install someone to the Senate who because of his experience in a leadership position in the House can automatically add energy and real public policy experience to the national Democratic leadership as it prepares to shape next year's general election strategy. They also would have someone who understands how to shape nuanced strategies so as to maintain Latinos as an integral part of the party's victories in days to come.

If Corzine does not appoint Menendez, he will give the Republican Party the opportunity to point to how the GOP is clearing the field to get minorities elected as Republicans. The GOP has been adept at promoting the few qualified minority candidates they have as they pursue elected and appointed office. The White House can point to its African American strategies in Maryland and Ohio as part of a real, not-lip-service strategy whose opening salvo was giving genuine, targeted support to Mel Martinez and because of those efforts, a Republican Hispanic now sits in the Senate. We cannot continue to miss opportunities to support credible Hispanics for office and expect Latinos to always support Democrats, especially in light of GOP gains in 2004 and their continued commitment to peel away more Hispanic votes from Democrats.

To state again: The Hispanic population is critical to the new electoral strategy that the party must pursue in order to win future presidential elections with the largest minority population in the country. And within New Jersey itself is the Latino population not the fastest-growing of the largest minority groups? And could not the Cuban American Menendez blunt Republican appeals to Cuban Americans in Florida year after year? Could not the party benefit greatly from Menendez' facile use of Spanish?

In the election just past, voters rejected the politics of personal destruction and they rejected anti-immigrant rhetoric. Voters overwhelmingly set the stage for a Democratic resurgence next year. Latinos should be part of that resurgence.

It would be a very good thing, indeed, for New Jersey to send to the Senate a man who is respected as a knowledgeable and hard-working public servant who can win on his own next year and from whom the national party could greatly benefit as it rebuilds its national prospects.