

# LATINO AMERICAN COMMISSION

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**Mission Statement:** The mission of the Latino - American Commission is to serve as a voice in the Nebraska State Government for Latino Americans/ Latinos.

**Vision Statement:** The vision of the Latino - American Commission is to empower the Latino Community through a pro-active approach to issues that affect their access to educational, political, economical and social opportunities in Nebraska.

## 2014 Legislative Session

The 2014 Legislative Session, January 8 to April 17, is a short session this year. Bills affect everyone, but some affect the Latino population more than others.

The Bills listed below are a few NLAC has been following, several that we have directly worked on such as LR 417 and LB 933, and many we have testified on:

- LR 399 (Wightman) Recommend enactment of Comprehensive Immigration Reform;
- LR 417 (Mello) Designate September 15 through October 15, 2014 as Hispanic Heritage Month in the State of Nebraska;
- LR 554 (Howard) Interim study: Gather information on extent of labor trafficking in Nebraska;
- LB 565 (Nelson) Change provisions relating to registering to vote and requesting a ballot for early voting at same time;
- LB 661 (Krist) Provide voter registration on the Secretary of State's website and use of Department of Motor Vehicle records;
- LB 662 (Krist) Provide & change requirements for voter identification;
- LB 663 (Krist) Change provisions for elections conducted by mail;
- LB 731 (Kolowski) Change provisions relating to workers' compensation first injury reports;
- LB 735 (Bolz) Require refund of certain insurance premiums upon death of insured;
- LB 754 (Smith) Provide funds for career education programs;
- LB 787 (Schumacher) Provide an income tax deduction for loan principal payments for graduate degrees;
- LB 793 (Wallman) Change workers' compensation death benefit provisions;
- LB 821 (Lautenbaugh) Provide a public benefits exemption for burial or cremation of an unclaimed body;
- LB 824 (Lautenbaugh) Change workers' compensation temporary disability provisions;
- LB 826 (McCoy) Provide for a study relating to education incentives for high-need occupation;
- LB 848 (Harr) Provide financial assistance under the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act for the development and acquisition of low-income housing;
- LB 862 (Lathrop) Change the amount recoverable under the Nebraska Hospital-Medical Liability Act;
- LB 887 (Campbell) Adopt the Wellness in Nebraska Act;
- LB 897 (Cook) Provide an income tax credit to employers of public assistance recipients;
- LB 933 (McGill) Change provisions and define and redefine terms relating to labor trafficking and sex trafficking;
- LB 943 (Nordquist) Change the minimum wage rate;
- LB 944 (Bolz) State intent relating to funding for early childhood services;
- LB 951 (Lautenbaugh) Change lump-sum settlement provisions under the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Act;
- LB 952 (Lautenbaugh) Adopt the Working to Improve Nebraska Schools Act;
- LB 955 (Dubas) Adopt the Paid Family Medical Leave Act;
- LB 956 (Conrad) Increase the earned income tax credit;
- LB 958 (Cook) Provide for appointment of a student achievement coordinator;
- LB 969 (Sullivan) Change a limitation on appropriations for special education programs and support services;
- LB 972 (Lautenbaugh) Adopt the Independent Public Schools Act;
- LB 1009 (Haar) Establish a pilot program relating to problem-based learning;
- LB 1010 (Janssen) Adopt the Nebraska Enterprise Act and authorize the Governor to award economic development grants;
- LB 1026 (Bolz) Create and provide for a Nebraska Educational Trust Fund;
- LB 1058 (Larson) Adopt the Interstate Compact on the Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote;
- LB 1064 (Lautenbaugh) Adopt Teach for Nebraska Program Act;
- LB 1068 (Sullivan) Change provisions to learning communities;
- LB 1073 (Lathrop) Require employers to E-Verify immigration status of new employees; and
- LB 1101 (Crawford) Change and eliminate provisions relating to state aid and learning communities.

As a constituent, you can voice your support or opposition to a Bill by contacting your senator. Visit [www.nebraska.gov](http://www.nebraska.gov) for updates.



Lazaro Arturo Spindola  
NLAC Executive Director

## A Message from the Executive Director

Good Afternoon,

We are currently involved in the 2014 legislative session, which is shorter this year ending on April 17. Many bills have already come and gone, but several are still being discussed or are just waiting to be signed into law.

Yet, there is still much work to be done.

There is still time for you to raise your voice with your representative. If there is a bill or law being debated in the state or federal level, you have the right to contact your representative to share your support or disapproval. This is what your senators and Congressmen are here for; to represent you. If you do not know who your representative is, go to [http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator\\_find.php](http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_find.php) and click on 'Find Your Senator' and enter your address. There are many bills we supported this year, and are continuing to support. Even if a bill did not pass that does not mean it is gone forever. Some bills that did not make it this year will be back next year and we will continue to support them. That is a good thing about the legislation, laws change depending on how the state changes to adapt with everyone's needs.

On a national level, there are many bills that are big topics among Latinos. You can voice your opinion on these bills but contact your U.S. Senator or Congressman. We have three Congressman and two U.S. Senators. To find out who your national representative is, visit <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/> and enter your zip code and to find your U.S. Senator, visit [http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm). It is not difficult to voice your opinion, just call or email your representative, tell them who you are and that you are their constituent, then say that you are asking them to support or not support a certain bill. This is your right as a constituent.

If there is something you want us to know, or if you just want to share your opinion on a bill or law, you are also welcome to contact us.

We are here to represent you,

Dr. Arturo Spindola - Nebraska Latino-American Commission Director

### Latino American Commission Commissioners

**Yolanda Nuncio (Chair)**

**Chandra Diaz-DeBose (Vice-Chair)**

**Chabella Guzman (Secretary)**

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**Jack Gutierrez**

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**Gisella Muñoz**

**Ramon Otero**

**Leticia Rodriguez**

**Jose Santos**

### NLAC Staff

**Lazaro Arturo Spindola, M.D.**  
Executive Director

**Jasel Cantu**  
Public Information Officer

**Dora Lima**  
Staff Assistant

**Visit Our Website:**  
[www.latinoac.nebraska.gov](http://www.latinoac.nebraska.gov)



*In December 2013, eight members of the Latinos Unidos! student organization of North Star High School helped with the Philippine Relief Fund at the Center for People in Need in Lincoln, Neb. The students helped put together relief packages that would aid the people affected by Typhoon Yolanda that struck the nation on Nov. 8, 2013. Later in the month, the students went back to the Center to help provide Thanksgiving dinner. Courtesy Photo.*

# Ballet is a Universal Culture

Ballet Nebraska in Omaha is the state's professional dance company with many dancers from around the state and nation coming to perfect their skills. Ballet is an art form that once had limited accessibility, but that has slowly changed over the years. In Omaha, there are several Latinas in Ballet Nebraska who are rising stars.

## The Little Ballerina

Among the youngest ballerinas is 9-year-old Lucia Revolla, a fourth grade elementary school student. She has just performed her first public performance of the Ballet's production of *Alice in Wonderland* where she played a flower. Lucia has been taking dancing classes in ballet, Jazz and tap with Ballet Nebraska for the past seven years.

"(Ballet) is fun," said Lucia. "It keeps me busy and I feel like I can do it."

Lucia's mother, Kate Revolla, wanted to share her own experiences with dance as a child with her daughter. "She's always liked dancing and music and she's dancing at the same studio I danced in," she said.

Lucia believes ballet is important because it helps with stress. "Ballet is so graceful and makes you feel relaxed," she said.

Lucia's father immigrated to Omaha from Bolivia, and her family keeps her heritage close by keeping in touch with family in Bolivia and enrolling her in the Dual Language Program at Castellar Elementary School in Omaha.

"It's important to learn about different cultures and languages," said Kate. "I think it's great to have a broader perspective in your future."

Lucia said she is thinking about becoming a dance teacher when she grows up. "I want to teach kids how to dance so maybe the whole world knows how to dance."

## The Rising Star

There are many teenage dancers with Ballet Nebraska, but 14-year-old Susana Pettis also takes folklorico classes along with ballet, ballroom, and fundamental choreography classes.

Susana, a high school freshman, started dancing with Ballet Nebraska when she was 9-years-old and is working to become a professional dancer.

"I love dancing," said Susana. "It's what I do, and I feel like it's what I'm meant to do. Dance is important because it shows a story and is intelligent. Dance is a global thing."

Susana's mother, Marta Sonia, originally from Medellin, Colombia, met her father, Glenn Pettis, at the University of Nebraska in Omaha in 1998.

"When she was a baby, she was always dancing," said Glenn. "I think respect for other cultures is very important. My daughter dances with people from other cultures and that interaction is important for her development. I'm lucky to have a Colombian wife because the riches of Latin culture are here with her and me on a daily basis."

Susana is enrolled in the Dual Language Program in Omaha Public Schools. Outside of Ballet Nebraska she takes dancing classes to learn



(Top left) Kate Revolla with her daughter, Lucia, following her mother's example to love ballet. (Top Right) Erin Alarcón, one of the leading dancers of Ballet Nebraska. (Left) Chloe Watson, a recent addition to the company. (Right) Susana Pettis, an aspiring professional dancer.

traditional Mexican and Colombian dance.

"I love being of a different culture," said Susana. "I think it's a gift if you're different; it's your life and who you are, and even if you don't want to you should attempt to find out who you are."

## The Prima Ballerina

Among the stars of Ballet Nebraska is 25-year-old Erin Alarcón a Mer-cyhurst graduate in Dance from New Jersey, she joined the dance company in 2010.

Erin has danced in the productions of *Swing, Swing, Swing, The Nutcracker, Alice in Wonderland, Momentum, Dracula* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to name a few. She has been dancing since she was 5-years-old after having seen *Peter Pan* and telling her parents that she wanted to fly. Her mother, Lisa Alarcón, signed her up for ballet. Since then she has danced contemporary, Jazz, tap, hip hop, modern and flamenco.

"I think dance is exciting," said Erin. "I get to be different characters and do different styles that are playful, sad, truthful, and lots of differ-

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# NLAC Photo Wins NCLR Affiliate Photo Contest

In our Fall newsletter we reported on an NLAC photograph that was selected as one of 10 finalists in the 2013 Affiliate Photo Contest presented by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR).

The 10 photos were available for public voting on NCLR's website for November and, after having received thousands of votes, the NLAC photo became a top 4 finalist. In January 2014, NCLR staff chose the photo as the winner in the 2013 Affiliate Photo Contest.

"We are proud to represent the hard work of NCLR's affiliates and to have Nebraska represented in such a positive way, nationally," said NLAC Executive Director Dr. Arturo Spindola.

NCLR is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States with a network of nearly 300 affiliated organizations, of which NLAC is one of two affiliates in Nebraska. The Annual Affiliate Photo Contest provides NCLR with an opportunity to showcase the efforts and impact the affiliates bring to the community.

"NCLR is proud of the work of our Affiliates. Your story has helped inspire many others, and even us, to continue our work to improve the lives of Latinos. We commend your tireless work to create opportunities for Latinos in Nebraska and we look forward to strengthening our partnership," said Daniel Rico, Senior Coordinator of Affiliate Member Services with NCLR.

The photograph is of Emily Hernandez, 16, a junior attending Lincoln East High School, proudly singing the national anthem at the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration held at the Capitol Building on October 4, 2013.

Hernandez is an enrolled member of the Ioway Tribe of Nebraska and is of Mexican descent. She was representing three nations at the Commemoration: the Ioway nation, the United States of America and the nation of Mexico.

Hernandez is no stranger to the spotlight and representing her community, she is currently Miss Nebraska National Teenager and sung in Ireland in 2012 when she was a student ambassador to England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. She has also met President Barack Obama and was present at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony on Dec. 10, 2013 in Sweden after receiving the invitation from attending the National Society of High School Scholars.

"I will hold my head up high with dignity, pride and respect and represent my many cultures for this is truly what America is today," said Hernandez of her win.

The photographer who took the photo for NLAC is excited for her work being nationally recognized.

Bethany Schmidt, 21, is a Political Science and Journalism student attending the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL). She currently works as a designer for the Daily Nebraskan, the UNL student newspaper, and as a page layout designer for the Clear Water Express Evening News newspaper. She had volunteered to take photographs for the Commemoration while working as an intern at the Nebraska Indian



*Emily Hernandez (above) sings the national anthem at the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration in the Capitol Building on Oct. 4, 2013. In the background stands NLAC Director Dr. Spindola, Mexican Consul Jorge Espejel Montes, and McDonald's representative Andrew Bucknor.*

*The image will be used on the NCLR website and in their promotional materials throughout the year. NLAC will use the image for promotional materials and exhibits statewide.*

Affairs Commission, which is located next door to NLAC. Schmidt expects to graduate in May 2014 and will use the prestigious honor for her portfolio and resume.

"I really liked that photo and I'm glad Emily is recognized as well," said Schmidt. "It was a lot of fun, when I cover events it's really standard but this one was lively. Emily was singing so beautifully and she's so passionate about her heritage."

The photo will be featured on the NCLR website and events, and will be printed in promotional materials and reports throughout the year.

"Our photo was different; it shows cross-cultural bridging and multiculturalism. We have a young Nebraska student who is giving back to her community by singing the national anthem. We believe that this image is an accurate and positive reflection of the United States of America and Nebraska. It is also a very patriotic image," said Dr. Spindola.

NLAC shares the honor with Emily Hernandez, Bethany Schmidt and everyone who voted for the photo including the Multicultural Alliance of Hastings whose members voted everyday for NLAC's photo.

We send a heartfelt thank-you to everyone who helped the photo win.

# Record Number of Students Graduate with GED

The largest class under the Spanish GED program graduated on January 26 at a ceremony held at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln.

The 113 students, of various backgrounds and ages, took Spanish GED courses with supporting institutions in Broken Bow, Lexington, Lincoln, Hastings, Norfolk, Omaha and Schuyler.

The graduates are Francisco Aguilar-Espino of Norfolk, Elvira Camacho of Lexington, José Martin Castro of Broken Bow, María Del Carmen Maldonado of Broken Bow, María Isabel Félix of Norfolk, Emmanuel Hurtado-Vargas of Norfolk, Gabriela Míreles of Schuyler, Sandra Portillo of Schuyler, Abelardo Romero of Norfolk, María Sagrario Sánchez of Lexington, María Leticia Serrano of Norfolk, Carlos Somera Téllez of Schuyler, and Reina Josefina Vinson and Llarasmira Zazueta of Norfolk.

The graduates from Hastings are Trinidad Saucedo Borrego, María Figueroa, Rosa Hernández, Juan Carlos Jiménez, Rosa Zamora Ochoa, Cynthia Parra, Brenda Ríos Pérez, Juan Otoniel Sánchez, Zarina Sánchez, and María G. Díaz Vargas.

The graduates from Lincoln are Jessica Álvarez, Seferino Ángeles, Arturo Ayotitla, Juan López Bautista, Wendy Camacho, Sergio Corral, Gricelda Cortez, Graciela Díaz de León, Ana Rosa Dimas, María Domínguez, Edwin Fernández, Edgar Gallegos, María Del Rosario García, Raquel García, Reina García, Nidia María de la Luz González, Pilar González, Néstor Hernández, Panoeli García Hernández, Francisco Magaña Ibarra, Adriana Sánchez Ibarra, Miguel Lepe, Carolina López, Ernesto Pineda Maravilla, Marco Ángel Maxe, Carlos A. Mejía, Patricia

Morales, Graciela Ocegueda, Ana Ortega, Cynthia Espinosa Ortiz, Julio Papalotzi, Néstor Pérez, Marlín Pineda, Juana Brisa Porcayo, Nancy Quintana, José Alfonso Ramírez, Andrea Reyes, Angélica Robles, Aquilina Urías Romero, Martín García Romo, Brisa Salgado, Alberto Salinas, Luisa Sánchez Santillan, Yolanda Sancho, Noemí San Martín, Viridiana Segura, Ana Torres, Wendy Villegas-Olmos, Heriberto Villicaña, Beatriz Waddington, Jeimy Zamudio and Martha Zumaya.

The graduates from Omaha are Beatriz Adriana Aguilera, José López Amador, Pablo Aragón, Guadalupe Argueta, Nubia Carr, Edevaldo Castelar, Maricela Castillo, Xiomara Cruz, Marlyn Cuellar, Rafael Estrada, María del Carmen Flores, Elvia Rosas Flores, Ana Luisa Gámez, Jenny García, Sharling González, Beatriz Hernández, Mitzy Hernández, Gloria Jaramillo, Graciela Jaramillo, Fátima López, Virginia López-Sánchez, Sury López, Alejandra Martínez-Avalos, Gregoria Martínez, Martín Martínez, Arturo Mejía, Aracely Mora, Haydee Ochoa, Marbely Pacheco, Raúl Pérez, Yudith Perlera, Rosa Martha Avilés Peña, Janay Ramos, Yisset Rodríguez, Fabiola Sotelo and Ana María Zavala.

The supporters of the GED program include Catholic Social Services of Lincoln, El Centro De Las Américas of Lincoln, Everett Elementary School of Lincoln, Iglesia Amistad Cristiana of Omaha, Iglesia Camino De Vida of Lexington, Immaculata Monastery of Norfolk, Latino Center of the Midlands of Omaha, the Creighton University Initiative of Omaha, the Migrant Program of Hastings, the Nebraska Latino-American Commission, Nebraska Wesleyan University, the Schuyler Resource Center and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Service Learning Center.



Students pose with their GED certificates on the ceremony stage at Nebraska Wesleyan University on January 25, 2014. To read more, visit [Mundo Latino Newspaper's website](#). Visit NLAC's website at [www.Facebook.com/NLACCommission](http://www.Facebook.com/NLACCommission) to view more photos.

# Pieces of Nebraskan Hispanic History



(Top) On January 16, Governor Dave Heineman signed a Proclamation observing January 2014 as Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Senator Amanda McGill served as spokesperson, telling the audience about the reality of human trafficking in Nebraska and the actions being done to address the issue. (From left to right) NLAC Director Spindola, Mary Ann Losh from the Dept. of Education, PIO Jasel Cantu, Debbie Bordovsky, Human Trafficking Community Task Force Member, Al Riskowski from Nebraska Family Alliance, Governor Heineman, Niki Behmer from Sen. Nordquist's office, Rachel Davis and Pebbles Jacobo from Free The People Movement, and Sen. Amanda McGill. NLAC organized the Proclamation signing and, with the help of UNL and the above mentioned organizations, put together the first Human Trafficking Awareness exhibit in the Capitol Building in early January 2014 (Left) where display boards, posters, brochures and informational material was available.



From January 29-31, PIO Cantu and Director Spindola traveled to Austin, Texas to participate in the NCLR Midwest Peer Affiliate Conference hosted by Southwest Keys. (Left Middle) PIO Cantu meets Gustavo "Gus" Garcia, the first Mayor of the City of Austin who is Hispanic on November 6, 2001. Cantu and Garcia discussed ways to improve Latino opportunities in Nebraska, one suggestion: Encourage Latinos to run for office.



(Below Left) Director Spindola shares ideas at a brainstorming session with representatives from various NCLR Affiliates. Topics included health, education, funding and more.

(Below Right) Southwest Keys Founder and Director Dr. Juan Sanchez mingles with the 39 NCLR Affiliate representatives. He shared the history and mission of Southwest Keys, which is to protect the Hispanic community and promote the well being of the community. The Affiliate representatives met at Southwest Keys for two days to share ideas and learn from one another. Among the services Southwest Keys offers is ESL and GED classes, immigrant youth shelters, parenting classes, alternatives to detention, alternative schools, culturally relevant education, and more.



## Upcoming Events

- **Holiday: March 31**  
Cesar Chavez Day
- **Event: April 12**  
Letras y Voces - El Museo Latino, Omaha
- **Day 60 of Session: April 17**  
Final Day of Nebraska Legislative Session
- **Holiday: April 25**  
Arbor Day
- **Performance: May 2 & 4**  
Ballet Nebraska's *Poseidon* - Omaha
- **Deadline: May 10**  
Latina Summer Academy Application
- **Election Day: May 13**  
Primary Election Day
- **Meeting: May 17**  
NLAC Quarterly Meeting - Peru College

## Contact Information

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## Latina Ballerinas Continued

ent emotions. Performing is when I feel most alive and there's no greater joy than being onstage and giving my joy to the audience."

Erin's father, Robert Alarcón is a soccer athlete from Quito, Ecuador. He was invited to the United States to play soccer in America and was a member of the U.S. Olympic Men's Soccer team in 1984. Erin remains close to her family in Ecuador. She considers her heritage the center of herself, like building blocks.

"Culture is what ties you to your family, it who you are, in your blood. You should know more about your culture because it's who you are," she said.

And that is where ballet comes in. As a professional dancer, she knows how ballet is taught from beginner to expert level, and she says ballet is taught the same way around the world. "It's a universal culture," she said.

### The New Dancer

More dancers join Ballet Nebraska every year including more Latinas such as Chloe Watson who recently joined the company as a trainee from Texas. She has danced ballet across Texas, the country and has even trained in Europe.

"I am half-Colombian. My mother and her parents are Colombian, so I grew up eating a lot of South American food and around a lot of Spanish. My family and I are very close, and they have been supportive of my field since childhood. My mom is a personal chef and often combines South American flavor and spice with traditional American comfort foods," said Watson.

Erin, Susana, Chloe and Lucia, along with the many Latina dancers with Ballet Nebraska, will be performing all year. Their next performance is *Poseidon* on May 2nd and May 4th; contact 402-541-6946 for more information. If you are interesting in enrolling your child with Ballet Nebraska, email [info@balletnebraska.org](mailto:info@balletnebraska.org).



On Nov. 15, 2013 the Latino American Commission staff and Commissioners attended the Heartland Latino Leadership Conference in Omaha, Neb. A youth conference was also offered this year. The Commission sponsored a bus to take 50 Latino students from Lincoln to the youth event.

(From left to right) PIO Jasel Cantu, Vice-Chair Chandra Diaz-DeBose, Staff Assistant Dora Lima, Commissioner Ramon Otero, Commissioner Norma de la O, Commissioner Leticia Rodriguez, Chairperson Yolanda Nuncio, Secretary Chabella Guzman and Director Arturo Spindola. Not pictured: Commissioners Jack Gutierrez, Dr. Ralph Hauke, and Gisella Muñoz.