

Latino Job Activists Walk Out of Meeting with de Blasio Aides

By DAN ROSENBLUM

[The Chief-Leader](#) (September 28, 2015)

A group of activists from the Campaign for Fair Latino Representation who are seeking to increase the diversity among Mayor de Blasio's top-level appointees walked out of a recent meeting with City Hall officials because they were insulted by the absence of any Deputy Mayors.

Though several administration officials were present at the Sept. 16 conference—including Citywide Administrative Services Commissioner Stacey Cumberbatch, First Assistant Corporation Counsel Georgia Pestana and Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley—Javier Nieves, the group's chair, said the members were frustrated that the topmost levels of city government skipped the meeting.

'SHABBY' TREATMENT

He said the group wanted a substantive discussion with Deputy Mayors Lilliam Barrios-Paoli and Richard Buery and Administration for Children's Services Commissioner Gladys Carrión instead of a "meet and greet" with officials. (Ms. Barrios-Paoli is leaving at the end of September; Ms. Carrión claimed a scheduling conflict) The handful of CFLR members decided to "make an action out of the meeting" by stating their objections to their "shabby and unprofessional" treatment and walking out.

"We're not anti-de Blasio, we simply are raising an issue that it is a civil-rights issue as far as we're concerned, in the Latino community," of high levels of unemployment in the workforce, Mr. Nieves said.

The group also objected to the "bumbling manner" in which it said the Mayor's Office for Community Affairs scheduled the discussion, with Mr. Nieves claiming its members weren't sure who would be attending even the day before. He added that the administration officials were "dumbfounded" as they left.

HIGH PROFILE, LOW NOS.

City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, born in Puerto Rico, is the first Latina to hold the post, and Mr. de Blasio has made several high-profile Hispanic appointments, including Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña. But Mr. Nieves said that only 11.6 percent of 425 high-level positions are held by Latinos, according to statistics from the National Institute for Latino Policy. Latino workers represent 20 percent of the general municipal workforce, according to the Independent Budget Office.

Since those numbers were compiled in July, Ms. Barrios-Paoli, the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, and Film Commissioner Cynthia Lopez announced plans to leave the administration.

In response to the perceived snub, the group sent a letter to the Mayor's Office, signed by seven of its members, stating that while they appreciated that some mayoral representatives met with them, the changes needed to go beyond those officials' jurisdiction.

'CALL WHEN COMMITTED'

"Accordingly, we have decided to postpone today's meeting unless and until you can either meet with us or a meeting is organized with key administration officials who have the authority to not only make decisions but can commit [to] take determined action on our recommendations," they wrote.

The group has suggested that each agency look into diversity hiring and that the city should refocus on how to improve the Latino staffing presence. In another complaint brought in a letter provided by the group, the Commission on Human Rights—which enforces the city's Human Rights Law—seemed "to be looking at human-rights issues from largely black-white and immigrant-non-immigrant perspectives without focusing on the specific concerns of Latinos in the city."

A spokesman for the de Blasio administration said in an e-mail that diversity was a priority of the Mayor's.

'UNFORTUNATE THEY WALKED'

"Commissioners, General Counsel to the Mayor, the Appointments Secretary, and a number of high-level officials were scheduled to meet this week with the Campaign for Fair Representation—it is unfortunate that they walked away from that meeting unwilling to have a constructive conversation," he said.

Mr. Nieves said that the group had a "very productive" meeting with the city's Equal Employment Practices Commission and that it planned to begin citywide forums on the topic, with the first one scheduled Oct. 2. Though a Quinnipiac poll released Aug. 5 said 49 percent of Latino residents think the Mayor deserves re-election, as compared to 40 percent who opposed another term, Mr. Nieves, a former State Assemblyman who campaigned on behalf of the Mayor in 2013, said support for Mr. de Blasio was dropping in the Latino community.

"He's coming to his mid-term of being in office, and so then the mindset completely changes because then you have to start thinking about re-election," he said. "And everybody becomes important in the process."