

# “It’s time to flex our muscle”

BY KELLY HUFFMAN

**CRISTÓBAL J. ALEX** is out to change the political landscape of the United States as the head of the Latino Victory Project.



**Although a record 11.2 million Latino voters** turned out for the 2012 presidential election—a historic number and a driving force behind President Obama’s re-election—some 12.1 million more stayed home.

**“We [Latinos] stay away from elections** because we don’t see folks that look like us, sound like us, or reflect our community.”

**Out of 435 seats in the House of Representatives,** currently only 33 are filled by Latinos. Congress would need at least 56 Latino Representatives to accurately reflect the changing population in the U.S.

**Alex recently moved from New York to Washington, D.C.,** to lead the newly formed Latino Victory Project. The group has set its sights high: “We want to reflect Latino voices and faces at every level of government.”

**Actress Eva Longoria and entrepreneur Henry Muñoz** are the visionaries behind the project. They’ve modeled this new effort on other political game-changers such as Emily’s List and the Gay & Lesbian Victory Project. “Eva is one of the smartest people. If she wasn’t making movies, she’d be leading discussions in the White House and Congress.”

**Raised by a mom who came to the U.S.** from Mexico to do migrant farm work, and growing up with an autistic brother, Alex saw firsthand the effects of discrimination.

**“It really made clear to me the need for strong social projects,** for movement-building and civil rights.” As a kid, he dreamed of becoming a civil rights lawyer.

**He had never been to Seattle before attending the UW.** “I took a real risk moving as far away as I could get from El Paso. Literally almost from day one [at the School of Law], I had the opportunity to get involved in social change

work...I really had the chance to cut my teeth in a way I wouldn’t have at any other place.”

**He developed the Pathways to Law mentoring program** that pairs community college students of color with attorneys of color, a program that was the first of its kind in the nation.

**While a UW law student, he founded the Farm Worker Justice Project,** advocating for Washington’s most vulnerable workers. Before graduating in 2001, he also organized a successful legislative campaign to give undocumented students access to higher education.

**Within 10 years of graduating, he was spearheading a \$60 million voter participation initiative** for the Ford Foundation. “It was one of the most rewarding experiences I could have ever dreamed of, working on voting rights in a time in which they’re under attack in a way they haven’t been since Jim Crow.”

**To convince his wife to move to D.C. from New York,** Alex agreed to add a new family member: a cat they call Valiente (Spanish for ‘brave’). “We named him that because this eight-pound cat was chasing our 67-pound pit bull from day one. He runs the show.”

**By 2020, the two largest states in the U.S.—Texas and California—**will be home to Latino majorities. That same year, the country will see a presidential election, a census and the subsequent re-drawing of legislative districts. The Latino Victory Project is gearing up for a big year: “We want to influence policy for the rest of the century.”

**“Politicians and pundits have long recognized the political currency Latinos bring to the table but now it’s time to flex our financial muscle and support candidates and causes that champion our American values.”**

PHOTO BY DAYNA SMITH