

# FCC Challenged to Take New Look At Hate Speech's Impact on Latinos

*By Jacqueline Baylón*

The California-based National Hispanic Media Coalition came to the nation's capital Jan. 28 to deliver a petition for inquiry on hate speech in the media to the Federal Communications Commission.

Hate crimes against Hispanics have increased by 40% in the last four years, FBI data shows.

Joined by representatives from five partnering organizations, president Alex Nogales first shared the NHMC's concerns and strategies to attack what he defined as "a huge and growing national problem" during a morning news conference at the National Press Club.

"This is the kind of stuff that is going on the radio, that is going on the television, day in and day out," said Nogales, whose group has been researching the subject for two years. "When we go to the internet, things are even worse."

Accompanying him was Francisco Javier Iribarren, assistant director of the University of California at Los Angeles' Chicano Studies Research Center, which conducted a pilot study to quantify hate speech in commercial talk radio.

From the study came a sound, "replicable methodology that could be used to establish the nature and extent of hate speech,"

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## ***Nogales: Hate Speech Leads to Hate Crimes***

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Iribarren said.

Georgetown University Law Center attorney Jessica González, who delivered the petition to the FCC that afternoon, explained, "It will not ask for regulation. Rather, it will seek an examination into the extent and nature of hate speech in our media and options for counteracting its effects."

Hate speech has been a factor in crimes against Hispanics, Nogales stated.

While calling on the FCC to take a fresh look at the issue, NHMC is requesting that the Secretary of Commerce, or in the alternative, Congress, direct the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to follow up on its 1993 report, "The Role of Telecommunications in Hate Crime."

There are those who want to keep hate speech "under the radar" and will claim that such an inquiry runs the risk of violating the

First Amendment, Nogales said, acknowledging that there needs to be a balance between resolving the problem and respecting the First Amendment.

The NHMC petition asks the FCC to invite public comment.

Another speaker, former FCC chairwoman Gloria Tristani, commented that because of the logistics of the transition to a new administration, it might take weeks or months for the commission to act. "All we can do is push," she said.

Ben Scott, policy director of Free Press, an organization active on Capitol Hill which advocates for greater media diversity, talked about how that balance could be kept. "This is not about censorship. It's about literacy, media literacy," Scott said. He pressed for greater scrutiny, both by the media and public institutions, of hate speech. "We need people to become more involved."