Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is with great pride and excitement that we share the Water Education for Latino Leaders (WELL) 5-year report.

In 2012, WELL was formed to foster participation from local elected Latino leaders and address the growing water crisis in California. Latinos and other people of color have been historically excluded from decision making and leadership roles, and the issue of water is no different.

Latinos represent nearly 40% of California’s population and only 2% of elected water officials and water policy professionals. That’s why WELL believes that the next generation of water leaders needs an inclusive forum to learn the issues, engage with elected officials and water experts, and form a constituency that is prepared to manage water with a 21st-century toolkit.

Water is the critical issue of the day. It is the civil and human rights issue of our generation. While the water crisis in Flint, Michigan brought national attention to this problem, we have similar challenges here in California. WELL was created to respond to and meet the water challenges here at home in California.

This report details many accomplishments from our first five years. WELL is the only organization of its kind and has grown from hosting annual conferences to include regional workshops, legislative briefings, and the creation of our flagship fellowship program, UnTapped. WELL UnTapped represents the next step of our overall mission: to develop a movement of well-informed local leaders in order to tackle water policy issues head-on.

The report concludes by looking ahead at the role WELL hopes to play in the future. Through continued education, engagement and action, California can effectively and responsibly manage its limited water resources. However, it will take leadership. WELL is poised to equip future water leaders with the education and guidance needed to make an enduring impact in California’s water policy.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Victor Griego
Founder and President
WELL

Celeste Cantú,
CEO
WELL
Water is essential for life. Next to oxygen there is nothing more basic for human existence. It’s a travesty and grave injustice that thousands of Californians don’t have access to clean and affordable water. Our oceans and rivers are polluted, wildlife and natural habitats are threatened and our water infrastructure is in desperate need of repair.

Tragically, California Latinos struggle with systemic inequities in its water system. A recent report found that of 57% of the 100,000 Central Valley Residents without access to clean water are Latino. Additionally, the ecological disaster in the Salton Sea has produced some of the highest childhood asthma rates anywhere in the industrialized world, and the surrounding population is over 80 percent Latino. Finally, and perhaps most troubling, Latinos don’t have a say in critical water policies throughout the state. Latinos make up more than 40 percent of California’s population, but only 2 percent of its elected water officials and policymakers.

Water Education for Latino Leaders (WELL) seeks to address these historic inequities by educating local Latino leaders on water affordability, equitable rate structures and stewardship of the watersheds we rely on. Working with our strategic partners, we develop local leaders’ knowledge and professional network to represent the next wave of water policy. We provide local Latino elected officials with tools for 21st-century analysis, and introduce them to the influencers and decision-makers who they need to engage with in order to best represent their communities.

Finally, through our annual conference and our WELL UnTapped fellowship, we seek to leave a legacy of Latino leaders with the network and skillset they need to meet California’s water challenges.
WELL’s Mission

WELL educates local Latino elected officials on water policies to promote timely and equitable actions that strive to develop a robust economy, healthy communities, and a resilient environment for all Californians.

About WELL and Our Investment in California’s Water Future

In 2012, a group of California Latino water experts and community organizers began meeting to create what has become known as WELL, Water Education for Latino Leaders.

The WELL team includes some of the most knowledgeable and respected water experts in California. These Latino water leaders embody California’s future, representing large constituencies and well thought-out perspectives gained from experience at national, state, regional and local water agencies; environmental justice groups; conservation groups; and local political organizing campaigns. As such, they represent diverse interests and are not monolithic in their approaches.

Now in our sixth year, the group has much to show for itself

- Six statewide conferences with over 150 attendees at each event
- Four regional workshops in four different counties throughout CA
- Two legislative briefings in partnership with Speaker Anthony Rendon in Sacramento
- Engagement of more than 275 of California’s 400 local elected officials representing Latino constituencies
- Presentation at the White House Water Summit, Working Together to Build a Sustainable Water Future, March 2016
Climate change has made a disproportionate impact on Latino communities in California, a trend that is expected to continue. That is why the next phase of our work will examine the effect of climate change on drinking water quality and health impacts in California. We will engage with strategies to adapt to the effects of climate change and protect our most vulnerable communities.

Filling a Gap for Our Constituency

WELL educates local Latino elected officials on water policies to promote timely and equitable actions that strive to develop a robust economy, healthy communities, and a resilient environment for all Californians.

Latinos are woefully underrepresented in California’s water policy making circles, WELL’s goal is to be inclusive and create a “bench” of Latino elected officials who are ready to take the helm and lead California towards a sustainable water future. As such, our programs do not require that participants be Latino themselves. We believe that if you represent a Latino community, you are a Latino leader.

Additionally, our programs are targeted to local elected officials because they already have significant water policy responsibilities and because 41 percent of the state legislature is comprised of former local officials, meaning that many of the leaders we train today will be legislators tomorrow.

We have significant challenges on the horizon, such as ensuring the Human Right to Water and managing our limited water resources in the era of climate change. However, we believe that California can rise to the occasion through education, engagement, and action. We are committed to developing the skillsets of local elected leaders because they will be our stewards in the near future. It is important to prepare them now.
WELL UnTapped

WELL UnTapped is our flagship program. Stemming from the success of our annual conferences, WELL launched our UnTapped fellowship in 2017. WELL UnTapped is a selective, six-month long program for local elected leaders aimed at helping participants make an impact in California water policy, while addressing water challenges in their own communities.

WELL UnTapped provides its fellows with an active exploration of California’s water history, governance, public policy, hydrology and economics in a context of human rights and climate change. WELL UnTapped emphasizes learning by doing. Fellows create a Water Ambassadors project, interacting with local water experts to train and develop community residents who promote conservation and resiliency within their communities as ambassadors. Fellows also influence statewide water policy by presenting their project findings and recommendations to legislators, who use that knowledge in their own policymaking decisions.

WELL uses a skills toolbox for UnTapped, which assists the fellows in successfully serving their communities. First, we use Harvard professor Marshall Ganz’s Theory of Strategic Capacity, which utilizes the skills, experiences and relationships of the people involved in the implementation of a project. Drawing ideas from a diverse group of leaders means better outcomes in planning, clear strategy and a successful plan of action. Secondly, we use the method of inquiry, which was developed to teach fellows how to ask the right questions and get accurate information about California water policy in order to make the good decisions for their communities, as well as to meaningfully contribute to California’s future water policy and management.

Annual Conferences

WELL held its first conference in 2013 in Los Angeles. Our goal is to offer local elected Latino leaders a comprehensive understanding of California water with the belief that their ability to navigate California’s water policy and water system is crucial for current and future decision makers. Later conferences were held in Sacramento, Palm Springs, San Jose, and San Diego. The theme of our 2018 Sacramento Conference is Water, Weather, and Warning looking at how communities can better prepare for extreme weather, fires, and climate change in California.
Regional Workshops

WELL’s regional workshops complement our annual conference by connecting local elected leaders with issues in their own communities. Our workshops have covered issues such as storm water collection, the Human Right to Water, and local water supply policies with workshops in Temecula, Paso Robles, Fresno, and Los Angeles.

Water Solutions Network

Most recently, WELL joined as a partner in Water Solutions Network with Coro Northern California and DIGIN, under the sponsorship and support of the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation. "Water Solutions Network encourages collaboration across water sectors, including agriculture, forestry and nonprofits by creating opportunities to address the most difficult water challenges. This includes participation in an eight-month program where 24 emerging water leaders create a cohort to learn leadership skills needed to solve the most difficult water challenges. A new cohort will be selected each year to join previous cohorts and other water professionals creating the Water Solutions Network. This program has uniquely demonstrated the need to foster a group of diverse leaders who are committed to a systems-approach of managing California’s water."
WELL’s board members are experts in understanding the complexities of water. They are a diverse set of leaders representing different constituencies and the varied perspectives that come from their experiences at national, state and local water agencies, including work in environmental justice, conservation initiatives, and community, political and labor organizing.

- **Celeste Cantú**, CEO, WELL
- **Susana De Anda**, Co-Executive/Co-Founder, Community Water Center
- **Tony Estremera**, Director, Santa Clara Valley Water District
- **Victor Griego**, President and Founder of WELL
- **Miguel A. Luna**, Principal, DakeLuna Consultants
- **Peter Silva**, Fmr. Assistant Administrator, Water, U.S. EPA
- **Nancy Sutley**, Chief Sustainability & Economic Development Officer, LADWP
- **Miriam Torres**, Program Manager, Resource Legacy Fund
Global Climate Action Summit 2018

In September 2018, Governor Brown convened the Global Climate Action Summit in response to President Trump pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement. WELL is proud of our involvement in the design and planning of the Water Pavilion, an affiliated event of the Global Climate Action Summit. The Water Pavilion gathered tribal, government, business, civil society, scientific and community leaders working toward a resilient water future in the face of a changing climate.

Combined, the events provided us with the foundation for a stronger articulation of the water-climate connection and inspired participants to make ambitious water-climate commitments.

WELL convened a panel, “Communities Making Opportunity Out of Climate Change,” which showcased successful green infrastructure and Indigenous responses to Climate Change impacts on our communities from Latin America and the United States. WELL’s future panels will continue to create an opportunity for communities to see the success of green infrastructure and exchange ideas.
WELL’s Future Work

WELL will build upon its successes and continue to focus on its core mission of empowering and educating Latino Leaders. WELL is positioned to expand our footprint and make an even bigger impact on addressing California’s water crisis.

Latinos are an integral and critical part of our state’s past and need to play a role in our collective future. While water is the issue of our generation, we seek solutions which empower our community and expand the knowledge and leadership of our Latino leaders.

Our ultimate goal is to address the lack of representation of Latino communities in California’s water policy-making circles. We will accomplish this goal by conveying the knowledge Latino leaders need to effectively represent their communities’ interests in California’s water policy landscape. That way, working with other leaders, they can make decisions that benefit California as a whole.

WELL believes that California’s water policies must be equitable and sustain vital ecosystems without compromising future generations’ economic growth and social welfare.

To achieve this goal, we must consider how best to pay for solutions and prioritize our public money.

Finally, WELL’s future work is driven by addressing the challenges of California’s water. These challenges are numerous, with most exacerbated by climate change resulting in extreme weather conditions. Water quality and availability is at the very heart of these challenges. WELL has succeeded in offering California’s local leaders a platform to explore varied perspectives on state and regional water policies. Our conferences, roundtable events, and UnTapped Fellowship program provide elected officials with the materials and knowledge that their communities need to transition towards a more sustainable and secure water future.

WELL will continue these efforts while increasing involvement in policy by encouraging participation at the legislative level to expand the role and parity of all stakeholders in California’s water decisions.
Strategic Partners

Our strategic partners are the National Association of Latino Elected Officials; the California League of Cities; the Latino, Asian Pacific Island and African American Caucuses; the California State Latino Legislative Caucus; and the California Contract Cities Association.

WELL’s diverse sponsors and supporters reflect the cross-disciplinary approach we bring to water policy:

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