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For Immediate Release

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California Lawmakers Pass Budget; Attention Shifts to Water

*California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger Sets Water Supply as a Top Priority;
California Latino Leaders Building Support for Comprehensive Water Solution*

February 19, 2009 – Sacramento – Following the announcement today that California lawmakers approved a budget package closing a \$42 billion deficit, interest swung quickly to the next crisis facing California: water resources. At a press conference to address the end of the budget standoff, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger took the occasion to talk about current drought conditions and need for a comprehensive water solution.

Members of the California Latino Water Coalition (CLWC), many of whom are elected officials representing those hardest hit by current drought conditions, said they would also move quickly to encourage talks among state legislators.

“Governor Schwarzenegger and the state legislature deserve many congratulations for prevailing under difficult circumstances to complete the budget. We’re hopeful that the spirit that took hold and enabled legislators to work together can carry over to discussions about a comprehensive water package to put before voters,” said Paul Rodriguez, actor and Chair, CLWC. “There are residents, cities and businesses that are counting on legislators to create a wide range of tools to address the water crisis.”

In recent weeks, the CLWC has met with the California Latino Legislative Caucus and other key legislators to brief them on how water is impacting local communities with large Latino populations. Especially in Southern California and the Central Valley, water shortages and the prospect of prolonged drought conditions are drying up increasingly larger segments of the state’s geography and economy.

In fact, on Tuesday, February 17, the governing board of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power voted to impose water rationing for the first time in nearly 20 years. Meanwhile, senior meteorologists at the Department of Water Resources also said this week that water levels will likely only be 77% of normal by March 1. In spite of recent rain and snow, 2009 is shaping up to be the third year of drought conditions across the state.

“Already, we are facing drought conditions the likes of which we have not seen in California’s recorded history,” said Ruben Guerra, Latin Business Association Chairman and Southern California Co-Chair of the CLWC. “Even in the event of a major wet spring, it is all but certain Southern California will face major water shortages in 2009 and in the years ahead.”

“Latino communities in the Central Valley are already enduring water shortages, have unemployment rates above 50% and long lines outside public aid offices,” said Mayor Robert Silva, City of Mendota and CLWC member. “California cannot wait any longer to come up with a package that helps people and businesses with meaningful water resources.”

There has already been much discussion and study of potential water solutions that could be agreed upon by state legislators and put before California voters. Members of the CLWC say a comprehensive statewide water infrastructure plan is the only viable solution to California’s long-term water needs. Members advocate a statewide program that includes fixing the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta, water recycling, conservation, improving water quality, groundwater and surface water storage capabilities, water resources stewardship and desalination.

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA LATINO WATER COALITION

To the benefit of California residents, farm workers, Latino families, businesses and communities on this statewide issue, the California Latino Water Coalition (CLWC) advocates improving the Golden State’s water supply today to ensure economic prosperity for tomorrow. We believe additional water resources are directly linked to creating jobs, stability and opportunity throughout California. The CLWC engages in public education, outreach and events to generate support and understanding on water issues. (Our website: www.gotwater.org).

The CLWC is a statewide coalition of influential Latino leaders that supports development of San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta environmental, conveyance and sustainability solutions along with additional water resources in California. With actor-comedian Paul Rodriguez as chairperson, the organization’s goal is to demonstrate the need for a comprehensive statewide water infrastructure plan, a program that includes groundwater and surface water storage capabilities, conservation and water resources stewardship, water recycling and desalinization.

The CLWC understands the negative economic and social consequences that will inevitably be felt by all Californians, but particularly the Latino community, as a result of diminished or inadequate water supplies, problems which are already occurring. A comprehensive solution to this water crisis is vital. We continue to meet with federal and state legislators to encourage framing of thoughtful and effective means of resolving these problems. Over the past year and a half, the CLWC has met with and briefed Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villagairosa, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, California Latino Legislative Caucus member Joe Coto and many other elected leaders. The CLWC has helped produce water forums and pro-water rallies, all aimed at boosting public awareness and support of California's critical water infrastructure and supply needs.

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