

# President's agenda lauded by Latinos

**Politics • Town-hall meeting sponsored by Hispanic groups is a hit with local entrepreneurs.**

**BY ELIZABETH AGUILERA**  
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**S**anta Ana restaurateur Otto Bade clapped his hands every time President George W. Bush emphasized that entrepreneurs should pocket more of their hard-earned cash instead of pay more taxes.

He was one of thousands of business owners and workers gathered Saturday in Ontario for a presidential town-hall meeting.

Bush discussed his economic-stimulus proposal, which includes business tax breaks. He also discussed job growth, trade, homeland security, immigration and education.

Orange County was well-represented, with more than 1,500 tickets distributed by the Orange County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Latino Coalition, both host organizations along with the Latin Business Association and the Ontario Hispanic Chamber. Bush's audience mostly consisted of



**MARIO RODRIGUEZ**, left, head of the Latino Coalition, introduces President George W. Bush to Latino leaders and business owners Saturday at a town-hall meeting at the Ontario Convention Center • Photo: Bruce C. Strong / The Register

census figures.  
The stop in the Inland Empire was a way for Bush to sell his economic-stimulus package, shelved by Democrats before the winter break. Bush assured the crowd that he plans to fight for the plan once Congress returns to Washington.

Bush praised small businesses for their ability to create jobs and help fight unemployment. Last month 124,000 jobs were lost nationwide, increasing the unemployment rate to 5.8 percent. In Orange County, the unemployment rate was 3.4 percent in November. Nationally, Latino unemployment rose to 7.9 percent from 5.8 percent last year, according to federal labor statistics.

Bush's stimulus package, which includes corporate tax breaks and tax rebates for low-wage earners, also offers 13 additional weeks of unemployment benefits and assistance with health-care costs.

Business leaders like the idea of the stimulus plan and getting a tax break, especially during this economic slowdown, but are concerned about rising insurance costs for disability and unemployment benefits for workers.

"Part of giving us our money back is regulating insurance companies that