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## Two Chicago lawyers help form Hispanic political action committee

By Allison Petty  
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A federal political action committee to support Hispanic candidates is gearing up for action, with two local attorneys at the helm.

Pedro DeJesus Jr., general counsel for Tampico Beverages Inc., conceived the idea for the Hispanic Majority PAC two years ago as a way to support progressive Latino or Hispanic candidates for federal office. DeJesus' dream came to fruition in October, when the organization officially formed.

The number of Hispanics in America is increasing, and DeJesus said he wants to see their representation grow accordingly. More than 40 million Hispanics live in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and that number is projected to increase to more than 100 million by 2050.

The organization's leaders say they expect to give money to a few Latino or Hispanic candidates in 2012 and eventually expand to play a larger role in national politics.

To get there, DeJesus said, the group needs more than money from its supporters. It needs energy and ideas.

"Our task is incredible, it's enormous, and to succeed we need everybody's help," he said.

DeJesus said Hispanic candidates are often discouraged by a lack of funding, which has an adverse effect on the entire community.

"Rather than get involved, they disengage altogether and then our talent pool narrows," he said.

Fellow Chicago attorney Christina L. Martini, a partner with DLA Piper, is one of the professionals DeJesus recruited for the group's eight-member executive board.

She said executive board members are

working to build a national board of directors, which will include more people to handle day-to-day fundraising and outreach efforts. Martini said the organization would look for people nationwide but particularly in key markets such as New York, Los Angeles and Texas.

"We realize that we need people on the ground in these different locations, and that's what we're in the process of doing right now," Martini said.

Also on the executive board is Washington, D.C., attorney Cristina Antelo, who works for the Podesta Group, a bipartisan government relations and public affairs firm.

Antelo said she heard of other groups with similar efforts to support Hispanic or Latino candidates, but chose to become involved with Hispanic Majority because it seemed to have a solid foundation.

"It seems to be a much more earnest and sincere effort as opposed to just a group of lobbyists, for example, that have decided they want to focus on Hispanic candidates," Antelo said.

During a series of conference calls, Antelo said, she and the other executive board members are hammering out the specifics of their agenda and a questionnaire to give candidates, as well as developing criteria as to what issues will inspire the group's support.

The organization's leaders are also revamping its Web site. The site, [www.hispanicmajority.org](http://www.hispanicmajority.org), provides a place for contributions.

In addition to donations, Martini said the group would welcome feedback.

"We definitely believe in what we're doing, and we really would like folks' support," she said.