

CONGRESSWOMAN NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ (NY-12)
CHAIR, CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
TESTIMONY BEFORE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court
July 16, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Sessions, and Members of the Committee. I have known Sonia Sotomayor for over twenty years. In fact, when I was first elected to Congress in 1993, I asked her to administer my oath of office. I can tell you personally that she is a grounded and professional individual.

Hispanics everywhere are proud that such a distinguished legal talent hails from our community. We have all been energized by her nomination. But of course, that is not the reason why she should be confirmed. The case for Judge Sotomayor's confirmation is built on her vast experience, keen intellect and tremendous qualifications.

It is not that Judge Sotomayor does not have a compelling life history. She does. As so many have already pointed out, hers is a uniquely American story--one that begins in the Bronx projects and, ultimately, reaches the highest echelons of our legal system. This background instilled within her the belief that hard work is rewarded, and the knowledge that--with the right combination of talent and effort-- anything is possible.

These core values propelled Sonia Sotomayor to remarkable heights. As her career progressed, she managed to reach nearly every level of the legal system. With each new step, she excelled, not only as a prosecutor and a litigator, but also as an appellate judge. And yet, throughout that process of achievement, she never once lost touch with her roots, or her Bronx neighborhood. Instead, she augmented her vast legal experience with a commonsense understanding of working class America. That appreciation will add a valuable perspective to the Supreme Court.

Make no mistake -- the stakes are high for Hispanic Americans. The Supreme Court will rule on many matters that are critical to our community, from housing policy to voting rights. These are delicate issues. With many of these matters, passions run deep on both sides. Resolving them fairly will require objectivity, impartiality, and an unwavering commitment to the rule of law.

Judge Sotomayor's record demonstrates these qualities. She has a reputation as a non-ideological jurist--someone who chooses not to spar with those who think differently, but to instead find common ground. When working with Republican colleagues, Sotomayor's record will show that--95% of the time--she managed to forge consensus. She was able to do this because she commands a sophisticated grasp of legal arguments, and has a keen awareness of the law's effects on everyday Americans. When the Congressional Hispanic Caucus reviewed a broad range of qualified Supreme Court candidates, *these* were the traits we were looking for.

We were looking for individuals who upheld constitutional values, exhibited a record of integrity, and had a profound respect for our constitution. It is our overwhelming belief that Judge Sotomayor meets these criteria. That is why we enthusiastically-- and *unanimously*-- endorsed her nomination.

Senators, the decision before the Committee today is one of your greatest responsibilities. I know this is something none of you, on either side of the aisle, take lightly. But, I believe Judge Sotomayor's record of judicial integrity, impartiality and, as she puts it, "fidelity to the law," is one we can all admire-- regardless of party or ideology. If confirmed, Judge Sotomayor's service on the Court will bring great pride to the Hispanic community. That goes without saying. But, more importantly, it will add another objective, disciplined legal talent to that august body.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.