

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez is currently serving her thirteenth term as Representative for New York's 7th Congressional District. In the 115th Congress, she is the Ranking Member of the House Small Business Committee and a senior member of the Financial Services Committee.

She has made history several times during her tenure in Congress. In 1992, she was the first Puerto Rican woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In February 1998, she was named Ranking Democratic Member of the House Small Business Committee, making her the first Hispanic woman to serve as Ranking Member of a full House committee. Most recently, in 2006, she was named Chairwoman of the House Small Business Committee, making her the first Latina to chair a full Congressional committee.

Given these achievements, her roots are humble. She was born in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico - a small town of sugar-cane fields - in 1953, and was one of nine children. Velázquez started school early, skipped several grades, and became the first person in her family to receive a college diploma. At the age of 16, she entered the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras. She graduated magna cum laude in 1974 with a degree in political science. After earning a master's degree on scholarship from N.Y.U., Velázquez taught Puerto Rican studies at CUNY's Hunter College in 1981.

But her passion for politics soon took hold. In 1983, Velázquez was appointed Special Assistant to Congressman Edolphus Towns (D-Brooklyn). One year later, she became the first Latina appointed to serve on the New York City Council.

By 1986, Velázquez served as the Director of the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States. During that time, she initiated one of the most successful Latino empowerment programs in the nation's history - "Atrevete" (Dare to Go for It!).

In 1992, after months of running a grassroots political campaign, Velázquez was elected to the House of Representatives to represent New York's 7th District. Her district, which encompasses parts of Brooklyn, Queens and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, is the only tri-borough district in the New York City congressional delegation. Encompassing many diverse neighborhoods, it is home to a large Latino population, with pockets of Polish communities, and parts of Chinatown.

As a fighter for equal rights of the underrepresented and a proponent of economic opportunity for the working class and poor, Congresswoman Velázquez combines sensibility and compassion, as she works to encourage economic development, protect community health and the environment, combat crime and worker abuses, and secure access to affordable housing, quality education and health care for all New York City families.

As the top Democrat on the House Small Business Committee, which oversees federal programs and contracts totaling \$200 billion annually, Congresswoman Velázquez has been a vocal advocate of American small business and entrepreneurship. She has established numerous small business legislative priorities, encompassing the areas of tax, regulations, access to capital, federal contracting opportunities, trade, technology, health care and pension reform, among others. Congresswoman Velázquez was named as the inaugural "Woman of the Year" by Hispanic Business Magazine in recognition of her national influence in both the political and business sectors and for her longtime support of minority enterprise.

Although her work on the Small Business Committee and the House Financial Services Committee (where she is the most senior New York Member on the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity) keeps her busy, Congresswoman Velázquez can often be found close to home, working for the residents of her district.