



Leading to Success: Chair Nydia M. Velázquez Takes CHCI to Next Level

Born to Lead

Not everyone is born to be a leader, a role model, and a champion for the people. But Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez is one of those unique individuals whose destiny would have it no other way. It is in her blood.

Born in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico in 1953, she was one of nine siblings. Her father worked the sugar cane fields, but was also a local political activist. From a young age she was influenced by political dinner table conversations and would accompany her father to political rallies where he fought for the rights of sugar cane workers and denounced the abuse perpetrated by wealthy farmers.

"My father instilled in me the spirit to fight for what was right," said Velázquez. "In high school I organized my classmates to protest against the dangerous and unsanitary conditions at the school. The building was closed and the protest caused the necessary renovations to be made."

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 New York University, 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!).

Making History

In 1992, after months of running a grassroots political campaign, she made national history. Velázquez was elected the first Puerto Rican woman in the House of Representatives, representing New York's 12th Congressional District.

In February 1998 came another first - she became the first Hispanic woman to serve as Ranking Member of a full House committee when she was named Ranking Democratic Member of the House Small Business Committee. In 2006, she made history yet again when she was named Chair of the House Small Business Committee, making her the first Latina to chair a full Congressional committee.

As Chair of the Small Business Committee, Velázquez knows firsthand about the struggles small firms face accessing capital, meeting payroll and keeping their doors open. She also hears regularly from those risk taking entrepreneurs around the country who are growing their enterprises, creating employment and strengthening their local economy. Velázquez has been a staunch advocate in Congress for small businesses as they are the drivers of economic growth, create two out of three new jobs and are responsible for half of all private sector employment.

In recognition of her national influence, her passion, and her accomplishments in both the political and business sectors, *Hispanic Business* magazine propelled Velázquez to another first

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- Former President Bill Clinton

by naming her its inaugural "Woman of the Year."

"Congresswoman Velázquez has been a longtime supporter and champion of Hispanic small businesses. With her national influence in both the political and business sectors, Ms. Velázquez is a worthy inaugural recipient of the Woman of the Year award." **Jesús Chavarría, editor and publisher of Hispanic Business, in April 2003**

As a fighter for equal rights of the underrepresented and a proponent of economic opportunity for the working class and poor, 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.

Visionary Leader

In December 2008 Velázquez was unanimously elected by her peers to lead the Congressional Hispanic Caucus for the 111th Congress. As chair of the caucus, Velázquez has focused on building a legislative agenda that increases opportunities for the nation's 47 million Hispanics.

At the same time, Velázquez became chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI), a non-profit, non-partisan organization whose mission is to develop the next generation of Latino leaders. She took the helm of CHCI passionately with a clear vision of CHCI's mission and the critical need for its programs and services in the changing landscape of U.S.

society and its economy. Velázquez understood that we must tap talent from across the country and open the doors of opportunity for more young Latinos to finish high school, graduate college, and get their start in the work force.

“Chair Velázquez is committed to a brighter future for the Latino community and she recognizes that the future of America is directly linked to the future success of the growing Latino population,”

—Esther Aguilera, CHCI President & CEO

From the moment she was sworn in as CHCI Chair, Velázquez began setting an agenda for CHCI to ensure that the organization stayed true to its mission while reaching a broader base of supporters with a critical message – the Latino community as the fastest growing demographic in the nation - must be prepared to contribute in technology, green jobs, energy and other innovation industries that will drive our economy in this millennium.

Early in 2009, she gave voice to this vision and message launching the **Towards 2030** initiative to engage CHCI partners to step up their investment in the Latino community as a national imperative.

“My vision for the next two years will be to set the course for the next twenty - to work to set the Latino community's vision towards 2030, where Latinos will play an increasing role in developing our nation's public policy and will directly impact the future of our economy and overall success,” said Velázquez in 2009.

CHCI: Developing the Next Generation of Latino Leaders

Velázquez has followed through on that vision and as she prepares to step down in January, she can look back at a transformational and impactful two years as CHCI Chair, where she has led the development of a strategic plan for the next five years, ensured the organization's strongest financial position ever, and supported and guided the expansion of CHCI's award-winning programs.

“CHCI has experienced tremendous growth under Chair Velázquez and she has set a bold course for the organization that will ensure continued growth for many years to come,” said Esther Aguilera, CHCI President & CEO.

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—Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (TX-15), CHCI Treasurer

Under Velázquez' leadership, CHCI's reach and scope have experienced unprecedented growth.

CHCI's overall reach has doubled over the past two years topping 1500 students this year.

- CHCI's congressional internships expanded to include spring and fall sessions, doubling the number of young, talented Latinos exposed to the public policy process in Washington, D.C.
- CHCI's college readiness program, Ready to Lead (R2L) has more than doubled in the number of high school students participating in eight cities across the country.
- CHCI's Graduate Fellowship is growing and addresses some of the most underserved areas for Latinos, adding education and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fellowships in the past two years.



In 2010 CHCI will award 150 scholarships, the most ever in one year. Working with new partners, CHCI is providing scholarship recipients with new opportunities to intern in the fields of health care and journalism in their local communities.

Her efforts as chair have led to the organization reaching record levels for revenue despite a down economy the past two years. Behind the scenes, Velázquez has worked with a dedicated board of directors to ensure CHCI remains financially strong and she has set forth an aggressive five-year initiative to dramatically increase annual revenue and continue to grow its award-winning programs.

“Under the strong and steadfast leadership of Chairwoman Nydia Velázquez, our Congressional Hispanic Caucus has thrived. Nydia makes every effort to push the issues that affect Hispanics forward and she does this with great success. We have seen the largest class of interns and fellows under Nydia's guidance which will create a lifelong legacy for Latinos and Latinas. I commend Congresswoman Velázquez for all of her accomplishments and I am honored to call her a friend.” **Rubén Hinojosa, Member of Congress**

Shaping History

Velázquez' success emanates from her unmatched passion to help her community, allowing her to succeed on all fronts. Along with her achievements at CHCI, in her role as chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Velázquez remains a stalwart champion for Latino issues on Capitol Hill.

“She has one emotional level – intense. She communicates one feeling only – passion.

When she asks you for something, you get the feeling that you can tell her yes now, or tell her yes later.” **Former President Bill Clinton on Nydia Velázquez, Speaking at Boricua College in Brooklyn, NY, January 13, 2000**

Under her leadership, the Caucus helped pass historic health care legislation providing access to health care for 8.8 million Latinos. Working with the Tri-Caucus, legislation was passed to invest \$2.55 billion in Minority Serving Institutions, with \$1 billion of that going to Hispanic Serving Institutions. Pell grant amounts were increased to assist Latino students attending colleges and universities.

Velázquez has led the efforts to put pressure on the Democratic Leadership to pass a comprehensive immigration bill and worked with Senator Menendez and Representative Gutierrez on the Hispanic Caucus' fall strategy to pass the DREAM Act, introduce comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate and cease the deportation of non-criminals. CHC has worked with President Obama to increase the number of Latino appointments in the Administration. President Obama has nominated the most Latinos to Senate confirmed positions than any previous president.

Velázquez lead the Hispanic Caucus' efforts in supporting the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. She is also credited with uniting the caucus and for expanding its work with national Latino organizations to ask them what their individual priorities are so that the caucus could put together a comprehensive agenda for the 111th Congress.



Velázquez' tireless efforts to help the Latino community on all fronts pay tribute to her father and the great leaders that have come before her and set a shining example for the many leaders who look up to her as an inspiration.

“Chair Velázquez is committed to a brighter future for the Latino community and she recognizes that the future of America is directly linked to the future success of the growing Latino population,” said Aguilera.

“Although the current economic turmoil is affecting the Latino community acutely, we must continue to prepare young Latinos to take on leadership roles in all sectors to ensure we are not left behind,” said Velázquez. “The Latino community must be a catalyst for positive change. We need to forge ahead and seize the opportunities so that by 2030, our young Latinos will be in a better position to lead, compete, and succeed.”