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SONIA SOTOMAYOR

## A trailblazer for today's Hispanic attorneys

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The confirmation of Sonia Sotomayor to a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court marks a significant moment in the integration of Hispanics into U.S. society. It also highlights the results of efforts put forth decades ago to encourage and assist Latinos to enter the legal field.

Many Hispanic attorneys, myself included, would not be lawyers without many of the programs that have helped diversify the legal profession and, thereby, helped elevate Sotomayor to the Supreme Court.

### Historic event

Sotomayor's appointment is truly a historic event that transcends political and ethnic differences among Hispanics. The Hispanic community, and in particular its legal community, have been firmly behind her confirmation.

Sotomayor has been a model

judge. She has received appointments to the federal bench by both Republican and Democratic presidents and she has a lengthy, consistent and exemplary record as a lawyer and jurist.



LOMBANA

Raised by a single mother in the South Bronx after the death of her father when she was just 9, she was valedictorian of her high school and then went on to Princeton University and later Yale Law School. Her judicial career began in 1992 with her appointment to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York by President George H.W. Bush.

Her connection with Latino Justice Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (Latino Justice PRLDEF) has been vilified, but it is this very organization that has helped thousands of minority would-be lawyers reach their potential. Since the 1970s, this organization has increased diversity in the legal profession and knocked down barriers for Latinos and

others to attend and graduate from law school.

The organization continues to offer law school admission prep courses and a wide variety of other services. On its web site, the organization states that "thousands of attorneys credit Latino Justice PRLDEF for helping them realize their dreams of becoming lawyers."

### Opening the doors

I can attest to that, since many of my colleagues in South Florida and I are in this group.

For years, the doors to entry into the legal profession were barred or closed to Hispanics. The Law School Admissions Test was a major stumbling block to Hispanics of high academic achievement, since most generally performed poorly on the test that served to determine law-school admission. Organizations like Latino Justice PRLDEF and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund broke down those barriers and provided many minority students the opportunity to become attorneys.



Judge is sworn in at her confirmation hearings on Capitol Hill.

Sotomayor started her career when these programs were in their infancy, which makes her achievements even more remarkable.

Few of us knew of Sotomayor just a few months ago, but that doesn't discount the importance of her selection and confirmation to the Supreme Court. Even before her nomination, she had made a number of significant firsts for Hispanics.

Conservatives — there are many of us in the Hispanic community — may not agree with all of her thoughts and ideologies, but we stand behind her because of her spotless record and how she has led by example. Many have pointed to the recent Supreme Court opinion on the white firefighters' case overruling her opinion on the Circuit Court of Appeals as an example of her errant judicial philosophy. To those critics, I point out that the Supreme Court is right not because it necessarily knows more law or how to apply it, but rather because it is the last to rule.

Her story hasn't yet been completed, but the significance to the Hispanic community of her confirmation to the Supreme Court should not be underestimated.

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