



AfrICANDO 2018

September 25-28, 2018



Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
United States Representative

I am proud to represent Florida's 27th Congressional District, a diverse area which includes Coral Gables, Cutler Bay, Key Biscayne, Little Havana, Miami, Miami Beach, Pinecrest, South Miami, and Westchester.

I was born in Havana, Cuba in July, 1952. At the age of eight, my family and I were forced to flee from the oppressive communist regime of Fidel Castro. We settled in Miami and put down permanent roots in our community. I attended Southside Elementary School in Little Havana, West Miami Junior High, and Southwest High School. In the years following, I earned an Associate of Arts degree from Miami-Dade Community College in 1972, Bachelors and Masters Degree in Education from Florida International University in 1975 and 1985 respectively, and a Doctorate in Education from the University of Miami in 2004. I consider education a lifelong journey.

I began my career as a Florida certified teacher. I also founded and served as the principal and teacher of a private bilingual elementary school in Hialeah. I was inspired to enter public service by many of the parents and students; to fight on their behalf for a stronger educational system, lower taxes, and a brighter economic future.

In 1982, I was elected to the Florida State House of Representatives and the Florida Senate in 1986, becoming the first Hispanic woman to serve in either body. In the state legislature, I sponsored the legislation for the Florida Pre Paid College Program, which



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is now the largest pre-paid college tuition program in the nation. More than one million Florida families have used this program to send their children to college.

I was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1989-- the first Hispanic woman to serve in Congress--following a special election to fill the seat held by the late Claude Pepper. I have been strongly returned to Congress since.

I remain committed to improving the lives of my constituents and our beautiful South Florida community. As the economy remains a pressing issue for so many of South Florida's families, I support reducing taxes and cutting unnecessary government spending. I also support plans to balance the federal budget and increase tax incentives for small businesses and middle class families.

Given my background in education, I have worked to strengthen the Head Start program. I have also supported legislation to increase the availability to student financial aid and revise the cumbersome and complicated Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) process.

I am a strong advocate of programs that address the serious problem of domestic violence against women. I was a lead sponsor of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which increases resources towards the prosecution of domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault. I also support legislation to increase criminal penalties for perpetrators of Medicare fraud. Medicare fraud is a deplorable practice which robs hardworking seniors of the benefits they spent a lifetime earning, while also wasting billions in taxpayer dollars.

As the wife of a Vietnam veteran and step-mother to Marine aviators, I am passionate about improving our nation's military, safeguarding veteran's health care, and ensuring that returning veterans have access to a college education. I also authored legislation awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). These women pioneers had been denied recognition for their service during World War II.

I am Chairman emeritus of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and am now Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. In this role, I continue to voice my strong support for the state of Israel and human rights, including my opposition to Castro's dictatorial regime in Cuba. I have also led on pressing foreign policy issues including the fight against Islamist extremism, and support of free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. I was proud to lead the fight in the House of Representatives to impose sanctions on human rights violators in Venezuela. I also proudly serve on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to help ensure our nation has the best intelligence gathering capabilities and processes to determine actionable threats.



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I am the proud wife to Dexter Lehtinen, mother and step-mother to 4 adult children, and grandmother to five beautiful grandchildren - Morgan Elizabeth, Caroline Grace, Killian Marie, Dustin Winslow, and Javier Enrique.