

ROS-LEHTINEN, ILEANA (1952–)

"In the beginning, I had to run against the political establishment of the time, and it was vicious," she said. "It was part of the mentality of the 'good old boy' network. But I knew that was what it was going to be like, so I did not let it get to me. I concentrated on my mission and my objectives, and I didn't worry about the rest of it. It's the same sort of opposition that anyone who doesn't fit the established culture would receive. But I think that perseverance counts. I think that when they finally realized how determined I was, they backed off." Opening door in Congress the community interview conducted by Victoria Stuart.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen was seven years of age when her family left Cuba for Miami, Florida. A graduate of Florida International University, she founded Eastern Academy, an elementary school where she both taught and served as principal. A state representative and later senator in the Florida legislature from 1982 until 1989, Ros-Lehtinen overcame obstacles as a woman and as a Latina. She became the first Cuban American woman elected to Congress in 1989. Recognized for an outstanding record in Congress, Ros-Lehtinen's most controversial stances center on her condemnation of Fidel Castro's regime in her native Cuba. In 1999 six southern Florida cities declared March 19 Ileana Ros-Lehtinen Day in her honor.