

TORAÑO-PANTÍN, MARÍA ELENA (1938–)

A native of Havana, Cuba, María Elena's family fled to the United States after Fidel Castro's rise to power. Her husband was imprisoned in Havana following the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs leaving Toraño-Pantín sole support of the family in Miami. She worked for Eastern Airlines and was soon promoted to the Division of Corporate Communications responsible for developing the airline's Spanish-speaking markets. She became director of Latin American affairs for Jackson Memorial Hospital and in 1968 joined the Republican Party switching to the Democratic Party shortly thereafter. The first Cuban American appointed to a federal position, she became associate director of the U.S. Community Services Administration in Washington, and served until 1979. Following her work with government, Toraño-Pantín created the National Association of Spanish Broadcasters (NASB), the first association established to represent Hispanic broadcasters in the United States and Puerto Rico. In 1980 she became president and CEO of META her own public relations firm. META received government certification as a minority business, and in 1986 its focus shifted to government contracts. Cited for its success by *Lear* and *Hispanic Business Magazine*, Toraño-Pantín's high profile as an entrepreneur brought her back into public service when she was appointed by President George Bush to the U.S. Commission on Minority Business Development in 1988. Toraño-Pantín was appointed to the U.S. Commission for Public Diplomacy in 1993 under the Clinton administration, and served as co- chair of the Development Subcommittee for the Presidential Summit of the Americas. Among her many achievements, she was instrumental in providing leadership and strong support for the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement.