

VELÁZQUEZ, NYDIA M. (1953–)

“In Congress, it is so important to me that the voice of small business, including minority-owned businesses, is heard. They are the backbone of the American economy, and women, especially Latinas, are opening businesses in record numbers. There is still much work to be done, but I know they are our future and I will continue to fight for them.” Nydia Velázquez, *Hispanic Business* magazine.

Velázquez holds the distinction of being the first Puerto Rican woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She was born and raised in the Puerto Rican countryside in Yabucoa, and became the first member of her family to earn a college degree. She received an M.A. from New York University in 1976. Five years later Velázquez joined the faculty at Hunter College, CUNY, as an adjunct professor. Velázquez embarked on a political career as special assistant to U.S. representative Edolphus Towns. The first Latina on the New York City Council, she has also directed the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the U.S. In 1992 she won a highly contested seat to the 103rd Congress representing the city's Twelfth District. She sits on the House Banking and Financial Services Committee, and is the ranking member on the Small Business Committee, which includes the Regulation and Paperwork Reduction Subcommittee. She also sponsored the Family Violence Prevention Act, providing protection services to underserved populations regardless of race, culture, or language. Velázquez cosponsored the English Plus Act with Congressman José Serrano (D-NY) and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), which encouraged the teaching of foreign languages in addition to English. She assisted in coordinating of a historic summit between national Latina health care professionals and then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to discuss health care issues in the Latino community. She serves on the House Financial Services Committee, is a member of the Capital Markets, Financial and Consumer Credit Subcommittee, and serves on the Subcommittee for Consumer Credit, Housing, and Community Opportunity.