

Jennice Fuentes
Chief of Staff, Representative Luis Gutiérrez of Illinois

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Start on the Hill

Jennice Fuentes recalls her path to her first job in the House of Representatives with Resident Commissioner Jaime Fuster.

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So I figured that, you know, I had written my thesis in human rights and I thought that maybe because he was serving in that committee he—I could be of use to him. And that's what I wrote in my cover letter, which I personally delivered, and a few days later I had a phone call from his chief of staff, who was a woman, who said to come in because they would like to talk to me. Of course I'm there thinking that they're going to invite me to take care of everything related—international relations and human rights. Well, no. I got offered a job as a caseworker which I was, like, confused by, because I'm like this seems really low, entry level position, a little higher than answering phones. You see, this is where you don't know anything about anything, right? I had no clue about jobs on the Hill. I thought because I had a master's degree I would be offered a big job, like legislative assistant, which I knew was a whole range for somebody young and so talented, but, no, that's not what they offered. They offered a caseworker position and for a salary of \$14,500. After taxes it's less than \$1,000 a month. And you know on the Hill you get paid once a month. So I was like, "Oh." But then my friends—I had done my research and my friends all said, "You know what, take whatever they give you. It doesn't matter, because once you're in the door you can work your way up." So that's what I did. I took the offer of caseworker and on February 5th, 1988—a Friday. I was like, whatever. On that Friday in 1988 I began my journey on Capitol Hill.