

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
U.S. Representative of Florida (1989–2019)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

First Latina Elected to Congress

Representative Ros-Lehtinen recalls how she learned she made history as the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.

Interview recorded April 16, 2018

The *Today Show* called and said, “Do you want to be on our, on our show?” And I said, “Well, I’m up anyway and your show starts pretty soon, why not?” And, and Katie Couric was interviewing me and she said, “How does it feel, to be the first Latina elected to Congress?” And I thought, “Wow, gee, I don’t want to correct you, Katie, but, I mean, it’s, it’s wonderful to be elected as a Member of Congress, I’m going to take my job seriously, but I don’t think I’m the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.” And she goes, “Oh, trust me, we’ve done our research, you are.” That’s how I found out I was the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress. How did it take that long to elect a Latina to Congress? Wow! And now, I’m so proud to see so many other Latinas elected to Congress. So, the world has shifted a lot, but I always felt a great sense of obligation, that I was representing not, not just the Cuban-American community, but the, but, but women as well, and Latina women especially. So, I’ve, I’ve always felt that, that burden, that responsibility, and that privilege, to be a voice greater than myself. And that does not mean that all Latinas agree with me or that all women agree with me or that all Cuban-Americans agree with me. I don’t mean that at all. But, but, by and large, I try to speak on behalf of, of a greater number of people, so that folks feel like they’re represented here in the United States Congress.