



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Senator Serrano Mourns the Passing of Senator Olga Mendez

JOSÉ M. SERRANO July 29, 2009

New York, NY- Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx) expressed great sadness after learning of the death of former Senator Olga Mendez, the first Puerto Rican woman elected to the State Legislature in the State of New York.

"I am extremely saddened by the passing of Olga Mendez, a dear friend and mentor," said Serrano. "She was a true pioneer and an inspiration to the Latino communities of New York."

Born in 1926 in Mayaguez Puerto Rico, her academic accomplishments are trumped only by her extensive work in public service. After earning her bachelor's degree from the University of Puerto Rico, Mendez earned a Master's Degree in Psychology from Columbia University, followed by a PhD in Educational Psychology from Yeshiva University.

Early in her career, Mendez was a strong advocate for improving social services in the community, and became a dynamic leader in the organization of voter registration drives throughout the country. She was elected Senator to the New York State Legislature in 1978, becoming the first Puerto Rican woman to hold the honor in the State of New York.

Mendez was elected as a delegate for the Democratic Conventions of 1980, 1984, and 1988.

During her time in the New York State Senate, she served as Secretary of the Minority

Conference in 1984, and in 1993 earned the honor of becoming the first Puerto Rican woman to be chosen as Chairperson of the Minority Conference.

"Due to her work to advance the status of Puerto Ricans in government, and because of her shining example, I am, today, able to make a difference in my community through public service," said Senator Serrano. "I will spend the rest of my career endeavoring to live up to her legacy."

Mendez represented the 28th Senatorial District for 26 years, passing the torch to Serrano in 2004.

"Even as her opponent, she made me feel at ease with her sense of humor, kindness, and charm. I feel fortunate to have had the honor to run a race with a legend," said Serrano.

"She fought like hell, but she always maintained a caring, loving, and humanistic touch—something sorely missing from today's politics. To Olga it was never personal. I love her. She will be deeply missed by me, and by the community that she served for so many years.

"I extend my sincere condolences to the family of Olga Mendez and to the people of the 28th District, and offer my prayers, thoughts, and sympathies during this difficult time of loss."