

## **Biography**

### **Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Florida**

I am proud to represent Florida's 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, a diverse area which includes Miami, Little Havana, Coral Gables, Pinecrest, Miami Beach, Westchester and the Florida Keys.

I was born in Havana, Cuba on July 1952. At the age of eight, my family and I were forced to flee from the oppressive communist regime of Fidel Castro. We settled in Miami and put down permanent roots in our community. I attended Southside Elementary School in Little Havana, West Miami Junior High, and Southwest High School. In the years following, I earned an Associate of Arts degree from Miami-Dade Community College in 1972, Bachelors and Masters Degree in Education from Florida International University in 1975 and 1985 respectively, and a Doctorate in Education from the University of Miami in 2004. I consider education a lifelong journey.

I began my career as a Florida certified teacher. I also founded and served as the principal and teacher of a private bilingual elementary school in Hialeah. I was inspired to enter public service by many of the parents and students; to fight on their behalf for a stronger educational system, lower taxes, and a brighter economic future.

In 1982 I was elected to the Florida State House of Representatives and the Florida Senate in 1986, becoming the first Hispanic woman to serve in either body. In the state legislature I authored the Florida Prepaid College Plan, which is now the largest pre paid college tuition program in the nation. More than one million Florida families have used this program to send their children to college.

I was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1989—the first Hispanic woman to serve in Congress—following a special election to fill the seat held by the late Claude Pepper. I have been strongly returned to Congress since, winning 69% of the vote in 2010.

To this day, I remain committed to improving the lives of my constituents and our beautiful South Florida community. As the economy remains a pressing issue, I support reducing taxes and cutting back unnecessary government spending. I also support plans to balance the federal budget and increase tax incentives for small businesses and middle class families. South Florida

has also felt the devastating effects of the housing crisis. I have fought to end predatory lending practices by mortgage companies and extend the first time homebuyers tax credit.

Given my background in education, I have worked to strengthen the Head Start program. I have also supported legislation to increase the availability to student financial aid and revise the cumbersome and complicated Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) process.

I am a strong advocate of programs that address the serious problem of domestic violence against women. I was a lead sponsor of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which increases resources towards the prosecution of domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault. I also support legislation to increase criminal penalties for perpetrators of Medicare fraud. Medicare fraud is a deplorable practice which robs hardworking seniors of the benefits they spent a lifetime earning, while also wasting billions in taxpayer dollars.

As the wife of a Vietnam veteran and step-mother to Marine aviators, I am passionate about improving our nation's military, safeguarding veteran's health care, and ensuring that returning veterans have access to a college education. I have been an outspoken critic of the Miami VA's recent failures to notify veterans who were at risk of infection, due to contaminated colonoscopy equipment. I also authored legislation awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). These women pioneers had been denied recognition for their service during World War II.

I am the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. In this role, I have had the opportunity to voice my strong support for the state of Israel and human rights, including my opposition to Castro's dictatorial regime in Cuba. I have also led on pressing foreign policy issues including the fight against Islamist extremism, and support of free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea.

I am the proud wife to Dexter Lehtinen, mother and step-mother to 4 adult children, and grandmother to baby Morgan Elizabeth.