

## **“The Great Escape”**

Having experienced “The Great Escape” celebrating a friend’s birthday party, the fear of excitement still comes over me. Unlike the game of escaping from a locked room with friends, Congresswoman, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen’s ‘great escape’ was far more fearful and a lot less exciting. For us the thrill of escaping to the other side of a lock door where our parents excitedly waited to see our smiling faces was just another day in the life of an average 9-year-old. However, Ileana’s eight-year-old escape was one of oppression, fear and hopelessness; for she was escaping to get to a place of freedom and opportunity. Having fled the communist regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba, she and her family knew escaping the island was the only way to make a dream a reality. Having made the ‘great escape’, Ileana arrived in the land of hope and carved a path for greatness.

Settling in Miami, Florida, Ileana attended school without fear and filled with hope. Upon graduating high school, she furthered her education by attending college and receiving her Doctorate in Education from the University of Miami. Her journey as a public servant began by first becoming a teacher before founding and serving as Principal of a bilingual elementary school in Hialeah, Florida. Coming from an oppressed country, Ileana was destined to be a public servant to fight for a stronger educational system, lower taxes and a brighter economic future for all Floridians. She became the first Hispanic woman elected to the Florida State House of Representatives and later the Senate where she sponsored the legislation for the Florida Pre-Paid College Program. Because of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, parents of kids like me have an opportunity to secure a prepaid college plan at birth. The pre-paid college legislation has helped to make obtaining a college degree affordable for Florida families including my own. Florida now has the largest pre-paid college tuition program in the nation, thanks to a champion for education.

So, when I think about serving in public office, I think about the work of Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen and how she continues to impact the lives of Floridians. Now that I've been elected to serve in the House of Representatives. I want to introduce legislation that impacts the community I live-in. Representatives are expected to take the voices of their community to Congress and show good-cause why the proposed legislation is important to his or her area. Like Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, education is important to me and I will champion increase funding for education with emphasis on expanding foreign language options beginning in elementary school. This is important to me because as our country grows we encounter more people from different cultures. I want to embrace everyone including being able to communicate. I think language is one of the first barriers we encounter in interacting with neighbors and classmates from different backgrounds. Champion the expansion of foreign language education, is what I will fight for!

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