

INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSWOMAN MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR

Congresswoman Maria Elvira Salazar represents Florida's 27th Congressional District. She currently serves on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs as well as the House Committee on Small Business.

Congresswoman Salazar is committed to acting in defense of individual rights and liberties, spearheading economic development & job training efforts, and promoting environmental resiliency in her community. She is well-known for her advocacy for human rights and democracy around the world, especially for the people of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua.

Congresswoman Salazar is a five-time Emmy Award-winning journalist and has spent her career holding the corrupt and powerful accountable. Congresswoman Salazar has gone toe-to-toe with Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro, Chile's Augusto Pinochet, and most notably Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. Starting at the age of 22, she has worked for the following major U.S. Spanish-language broadcasting networks: Telemundo, Univision, AmericaTeve, MegaTV, and CNN en Español.

Salazar was born in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood, the daughter of Cuban exiles. She studied at the Deerborne School of Coral Gables and graduated from Miami Dade College. Salazar holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of Miami and a Master of Public Administration from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in diversity in Congress. Could you please describe your experience as a conservative Latina in politics?

The Republican Party is embracing and encouraging diversity, and I am the best example. I came from Little Havana, I have an accent, and I represent one of the most diverse cities in the country. The GOP is increasingly reflecting what the American people look like as more and more minorities join the party. The Republican Party represents our values—entrepreneurship, free enterprise, and the meritocracy that allows every single person to achieve the American Dream.

What advice do you have for Latinas who want to pursue a career in law and policy?

I was a Spanish-language journalist for over 35 years—that was my career. I got into politics late in life, becoming a Member of Congress at the age of

59. The first time I ran for this seat, I lost by 6 points. When I ran again, everyone told me I would never win. When I finally won, national media called it “the biggest upset in the country.” Never let anybody tell you what you cannot do. Nothing can beat passion and hard work.

What issues do you think most affect Latin Americans in your constituencies or in the nation? How can we overcome these issues?

Almost 60% of Miami’s residents are immigrants. Most of America’s immigrants come to the United States to flee oppression or economic instability in their home countries in search of the American Dream. I want to preserve that American Dream and make sure everyone has the opportunity to live it. One of the things I’ve noticed, unfortunately, is politicians exploiting our broken immigration system for political profit instead of coming together to fix it. The lack of results has led to the suffering of our community—the Latino community. That’s why I recently introduced my *Dignity Act*, a top-to-bottom immigration reform bill that combines proposals from both parties to fix our immigration system once and for all. Washington cannot continue to play political football with our community. We want results, not false promises. If our country is to continue being the beacon of hope and democracy, we must make sure our doors are open for those who want to contribute to keeping our country great.

This past year we have seen an increase in scholarship about potential statehood for Puerto Rico. Could you please discuss this trend and the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act?

After my family escaped Castro’s Cuba, I spent the first 10 years of my life in Puerto Rico. It was there where I first learned about American values, the meaning behind the American flag, and the essential value of freedom. Puerto Rico represents the diversity and values of our country, and I think it’s only right that the island joins the rest of the Union. The 3.2 million people that live on the island are deprived of a full voice in our nation’s government, and Puerto Ricans overwhelmingly support the idea of statehood. I’m working every day with my colleagues in Congress to make sure that we one day see Puerto Rico represented as the 51st star on the American flag.

What is your perspective on economic empowerment for Latin Americans in the United States? What are some barriers to economic empowerment? How should we overcome them?

The United States is a place where everyone has an opportunity to achieve success. Since coming to Congress, I’ve worked to reduce inflation so that people have the freedom and flexibility to start their own businesses. As a member of the Small Business Committee, I’ve also worked to cut burdensome regulations for those seeking assistance in their entrepreneurial endeavors. In my office, I created the first-ever Prosperity Center, where my

staff and I work to help constituents become contractors with the federal government—one of the highest honors as an immigrant. My Prosperity Center also centralizes resources from the government to retrain workers or help them find a job in our community.

My priority is creating a level playing field for all, ensuring everyone can create their own success. My goal as a member of Congress is to lay out the red carpet—not the red tape—for people who want to start their own businesses. That is truly the American Dream.

