

Hilda Solis, Secretary of Labor (first campaign: Board of Trustees, Rio Hondo Community College District, Los Angeles County, 1985) (It's a real office—selected by the voters of Los Angeles County every 4 years). 27 years old at time. Turned 28 2 weeks before election. Democrat.

And partly because I had seen what had happened while I was back here in Washington, back in the 80's when Carter just...you know he had lost badly, he was only a 1 term president and how mean politics could be and how raw it was. And I just kind of made a commitment I think to myself that gee, this is really hard work and I don't know if I could ever, if I could ever withstand that so I'm going to just focus in on what I think I know best and that's grounded in helping to run programs, to help people out and something much more secure because at that point politics to me sounded like it was on very shaky ground. And of course that had a lot to do with my feelings at that time about - an uneasiness about running, you know, running for an office because it took so much you put yourself out there, you expose yourself, your family, your friends and so called friends. You find out quickly who your friends are and who aren't among your friends that you thought you could count on.

Well, no one likes rejection. No one likes to be rejected and especially people that you, you lean on or you ask for advice that they're going to be in many ways, be quick to judge and say "why are you doing that? Why are you veering away?" Even my father, I'll never forget. My father kind of questioned me "well you know, you should...you really should be looking at establishing yourself in your career. What did you go study for? And blah, blah, blah, blah..." And you know "the politics, it's so bad." I mean they had, my parents had very bad experiences in politics, come from different countries so you know where politics is very corrupt.

It was bad. It was very corrupt. Very...just their experience with government in their countries was very poor, very oppressive, very abusive and not very...did not treat everyone equally and fair. So you know, that's part of why they, they left you know as immigrants to this country, to find something better where they knew there would be better education, better treatment in the workplace, better you know, overall ability to succeed here and you could do it if you worked hard.

Oh they were very...yeah, they were, they were pretty cautious. And I remember my mom's always very you know, very traditional mother, parent. You know "why are you doing this? You should just focus on what, what you prepared yourself for. I mean why do you want to go out there and spend so much time doing all these things?" And it was kind of hard for me to explain to her what that meant. My father knew a little bit more

about that because he was very active in his union and he was a shop steward so he was a leader, organizing and you know I think he was...he was always supportive. He had limited time to give me at that, at that point in our life but it was very important. I'll never forget the picture I have in my mind of both he and my mom standing over a workbench, whatever, pushing back and forth making these posters and all muddled up with paint and you know, just being out there helping to encourage people to come and help volunteer. That was really, really nice.

There was (were) gated houses and you could tell that these houses in some cases were run down and they weren't safe, some neighborhoods were not safe and I was told that ahead of time. So I usually walk with a group of people or other folks to make sure we had teams. And it was, it was you know, it's, how could I say, a bit uncomfortable going into someone's front yard, knocking on their door and not knowing what to expect because you would get all sorts of people. You get people who wouldn't even open the door and assume that I was passing out religious material. And some people who just looked at me and just...- I actually had someone say "we don't vote for your kind." And that was something that really you know, just was very disappointing to hear that. But you know, there's a lot of folks that you know, don't always understand what this is all about, so that was also hard. You continue to see things like that as you run for different offices only it comes in different forms.

It was...we didn't do any polling. It was such a small campaign all we could do was make sure that when we made phone calls to people to encourage them to...well, are you a yes vote or a no vote or I would be introducing myself, make sure that we made notations and tally up who those "yes" votes were, who we missed, who didn't answer their phone. And then constantly going back and calling those homes or walking the precincts and leaving personal notes that I would write and we'd use...we'd punch a hole in the mailer and put a rubber band through it and I'd put a little post-it, not even a post-it because they didn't have post-it's at that time and I'd write "Sorry I missed you, Hilda Solis. Call me if you have any questions." And you'd be surprised, some people wouldn't answer their door when I'd leave the material, they'd come running out of their house afterwards saying "did you leave this at my house? Is this you? Can I talk to you?" And then we'd start a conversation. And it was just amazing how people would tell me...- This is one thing I'll never forget about that campaign too is that people would tell me "you're the first candidate to ever come knocking on my door." And to this day, I still see people back in that city who tell me "I remember voting for you Solis. You were the first person I voted for." That's pretty empowering.

I was tired. I was tired, in fact if anything I got a lot of exercise. I think I lost like 10 or 15 pounds, people...it was noticeable. People said "wow Hilda, what's going on?" I go "I've been walking," and it was, you know it was a fall election in California at the time, it's still summer in September and October so you're out and it was hard, it was really tough. I remember that and I'd worry a lot thinking "gee, did we do the right thing? Did we get to as many people as we could have?" And even though we thought maybe we were gaining more support in some places that wasn't necessarily the case. And what happened that also struck me as really interesting is that even though people told you they'd vote for you, they didn't go out to vote at all and so you always have to kind of factor that in, in your calculations. So you always have to over project who you're going to count on because you're always going to have a percentage that won't show up no matter what and that, that's pretty true in I think every election.

I have a lot of brothers and sisters but not all of them thought this (campaigning) was something they wanted to do. And my younger sisters who are like 10 years younger than me were about I think they were like 15 or 14 years old. I'll never forget, they got on their bikes and made these like man made or human signs, we call them human signs and put my signs on the front and back and started going up and down the streets. And the day of the election, we had a chow, a dog, their dog actually and they put signs on the dog and they had the dog at some of the major street corners where people were coming in and out. I'll never forget that. And it worked, people would honk their horns you know in their cars and say "wow, high 5." It was pretty cool.

They would go you know, like someone advertising pizza you know with their crazy signs. Think about it only that was like so long ago and they were like a human sign, just advertising for people to remember to go vote, to vote for me.