

**STATEMENT OF
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FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION
OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**PRESENTED
SEPTEMBER 9, 2009**

Good afternoon. Thank you very much Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Sessions and members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me the opportunity to present my testimony today. I also wish to thank Senator Whitehouse for chairing this hearing.

I am deeply honored that President Obama has nominated me for the important post of Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division at the United States Department of Justice. I am grateful to the President and Attorney General Holder for their confidence in me. If I am confirmed, I will do my very best to demonstrate that I am worthy of their trust and yours.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce my family. With us today are my mother Zenith Moreno, sisters Patricia Moreno and Veronica Acosta, brother Carlos Moreno, and niece and nephew Francesca and Alexander Moreno. My father Carlos Moreno was unable to travel here today, but is with us in spirit. It also gives me great pleasure to introduce my husband and son, Robert and Nicholas Begotka. Today is Nicholas's first day of fourth grade, but instead we thought he would experience an important civics lesson on the advice and consent role of the Senate. My family is my rock. I would not be here today, but for their unfailing encouragement and support. I especially wish to thank my mother for her many and sustained sacrifices. She is my hero. Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank my friends, mentors, colleagues and supporters, some of whom have joined us today.

Mr. Chairman, I am committed to the Division's core mission: strong enforcement of the federal civil and criminal environmental laws to ensure clean air, water and land for all Americans; vigorous defense of environmental laws and agency actions and protection of the public fisc; effective stewardship of our public lands and natural resources; and mindful management of the United States' trust obligations to Native Americans.

During my tenure in the Division, I saw first-hand the importance of the Division's work to the American people. I traveled extensively in Texas, New Mexico and California and

witnessed the devastation of pollution in the New River and the Rio Grande River. I met with residents in some of our most impoverished communities, who lacked basic necessities such as a safe source of drinking water for themselves and their children. To address this significant and unacceptable threat to human health, I assembled and coordinated a team from the Department of Justice, United States Attorney offices in Texas and New Mexico, State Attorney General offices in Texas and New Mexico, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other key federal agencies. I was gratified when our efforts led to tangible results—a source of safe drinking water for a Colonias community in Texas, which along with other commitments were memorialized in a precedent-setting consent decree upon which the Division relied in addressing subsequent Safe Drinking Water Act matters.

I was honored to serve the Division for seven years as Special Assistant, Counsel, and then Principal Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General, and was honored when my work was recognized with special commendations from the Division and two Bronze Medals from EPA for outstanding service, including in connection with efforts to identify and mitigate pollution sources into the New River.

In addition to my government service, I have significant private sector experience with the law firms of Hogan & Hartson and Spriggs & Hollingsworth, as well as in my current position as a counsel in Corporate Environmental Programs at General Electric. My private sector experience has added to the knowledge, insight and skills that I would bring to the job of enforcing environmental laws and defending challenges to government programs and actions.

During my time in the private sector, I remained committed to protecting the environment and serving the public in a *pro bono* capacity. For example, I successfully represented several environmental organizations *pro bono* in advocating for a 90% reduction in sulfur dioxide emissions from an uncontrolled coal-fired power plant that were impairing visibility at the Grand Canyon. Our team's work will help preserve the Grand Canyon's magnificent vistas for years to come. I have held several leadership posts with the American Bar Association's Section on Environment, Energy and Resources and have been a long-time member of the Board of Advisors for the Center for International Environmental Law. I also have served as General Counsel for the Hispanic National Bar Association, President of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia, on committees of the District of Columbia Bar, and on the Board of Directors of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. My other public service includes advocacy on issues affecting the Hispanic community and work with disadvantaged public school children in the District of Columbia and upstate New York.

As an immigrant to the United States from Colombia, I have been grateful for the opportunities that this country has offered me. Due to my parents' inspiration and hard work, we have accomplished much beyond our greatest expectations. For this reason, I have always asked: "What can I give back for all that I have received?"

This is why public service is so meaningful to me. If I should be so fortunate as to be confirmed, I would cherish the opportunity to work again with the Division's talented and dedicated professionals to realize the Division's important mission. For me, it would be like going back home.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.