

Testimony of

The Honorable Lewis Douglass

October 1, 2003

Statement of
Lewis L. Douglass
Chairperson of the
New York State Commission on Minorities
in support of the appointment of
Dora L. Irizarry
for
District Judge of Eastern District of New York

I am Lewis L. Douglass, a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court.

I am also the Chairperson of the New York State Commission on Minorities, a Commission consisting of 21 lawyers and judges appointed by the Chief Judge to develop programs to improve opportunities for minorities and to improve the perception of fairness on a part of minorities in the New York Court system. We hold hearings throughout the State and maintain an ongoing liaison with minority Bar Associations and develop training programs for State judges on issues of diversity.

I met Judge Irizarry about 10 years ago, when we both were judges appointed by the Governor to sit on a court called the Court of Claims. Our assignments had nothing to do with claims. It was an appointed Court created to handle the overload of felony prosecutions,

we were all appointed to the Court of Claims and then immediately assigned to the Supreme Court to handle major felony prosecutions.

Judge Irizarry steadily gained a reputation among lawyers as a superb judge. She did expect all who appeared before her to adhere to the rules and to perform in a way that enhanced the dignity of the Court. She was, nevertheless, fair and even handed.

Like many of us who grew up in inner cities, she believed that when a person is found guilty, after a fair trial, it is important that government, through the Courts, make a strong statement that criminal behavior is unacceptable . . . and that social circumstances are not an excuse for crime. In short, she had a reputation as a tough but fair judge. While presiding over these felony cases, she took on young lawyers as interns and became very active in Bar Associations activities eventually becoming President of the Hispanic Judges Association.

I am sure you are aware of her excellent academic background, having graduated from Yale and Columbia Law school.

Let me, however, turn to what I think is a particularly unique and important point. We have done remarkable things in this country in the

past 50 years since the Supreme Court outlawed segregation and moved us to a more opened society. Judge Irizarry's appointment would be another confirmation of that achievement. In the mid 1960's, her father worked as an electrician at the federal building in lower Manhattan which housed the Federal Court. At that time, like other minorities, he worked in the federal projects because minorities were not then readily admitted into the Unions. He of course admired Federal Judges, as we all did. The idea that his daughter would some day stand before a Committee of the Congress for consideration for appointment as a Federal Judge, would have been pure fantasy. But here we are considering the appointment of Dora, now having graduated from Yale and Columbia and having served as a State Court judge.

I tell you it makes me feel great not only to endorse her because of her scholarship and reputation as a State Judge . . . and because she is one of the nicest people I know . . . but it makes me feel good because it shows that all the struggles, all the demonstration and all the tears where all worthwhile . . . and we can be proud of the system of government under which we live.