

Statement of
Senator Bill Nelson

United States Senator
Florida
June 16, 2004

Members of the Judiciary Committee, it is with great pride and pleasure that I have the opportunity to introduce Judge Virginia Hernandez Covington for appointment to the United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Judge Covington's two children who have accompanied her today, Laura and Stephen. It is my understanding that Judge Covington's oldest son Michael could not attend. He is a law student at Stetson College of Law, no doubt following in the footsteps of his parents. Judge Covington's husband, Douglas Bagge, also an attorney, has remained in Florida to care for her mother whose health would not allow her to travel.

Judge Covington's story should serve as an inspiration to us all. Judge Covington's family left Cuba in December 1953, for Florida. They settled in Tampa, spoke no English, knew no one, and had very limited resources. The citizens of Tampa welcomed her family with open arms, and Judge Covington, who was born on July 12, 1955, learned a valuable lesson about the importance of community. Judge Covington, in addition to having a very distinguished and impressive legal career, which I will get to in a moment, has been extremely active in community affairs and dedicated to giving back to the community by helping those less fortunate. This is a lesson she passed on to her children who are each involved in community service.

Judge Covington graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Tampa, where she also received the Outstanding Female Graduate Award. She went on to earn a Master of Business Administration at the University of Tampa before leaving Florida to earn her law degree at Georgetown University Law Center. After graduating from Georgetown University Law Center, she worked as a trial attorney for the Federal Trade Commission and then as an Assistant State Attorney for Hillsborough County, Florida. She then joined the United States Attorney's Office in 1983. For 12 of the nearly 20 years she was at the U.S. Attorney's Office, she served as Chief of the Asset Forfeiture Section of the United States Attorney's Office. During her tenure at the United States Attorney's Office she received more than 70 written commendations. Governor Bush appointed Judge Covington to the Second District Court of Appeals in 2001.

In addition to Judge Covington's experience as a prosecutor, she has lectured extensively on asset forfeiture, money laundering, and complex prosecutions to prosecutors and law enforcement, as well as teaching trial advocacy practice and procedure throughout Latin America.

Judge Covington has received numerous honors and awards throughout her distinguished career. She was the 1999 winner of the Raymond E. Fernandez Award given by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Hispanic Advisory Council in recognition of her outstanding contributions to

the Hispanic Community. In 2002 she was selected as one of Hillsborough County's Outstanding Latin Women; and in 2003 she received Tampa's Hispanic Woman of the Year Award.

We have an extraordinarily qualified candidate in Judge Covington, and I give her my full-hearted endorsement. Senator Graham, who has asked me to submit his remarks for the record, has also indicated his support for Judge Covington.