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# Obama picks first Hispanic Supreme Court justice

By Stephen Collinson – 5 hours ago

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Barack Obama Tuesday nominated judge Sonia Sotomayor as the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice, praising her "inspiring" rise from humble beginnings to fulfill the American dream.

Sotomayor is a pick in Obama's own image, as an ethnic minority child who triumphed over prejudice to reach the pinnacle of US public life, and she represents the president's first bid to shape the high court for a generation.

Her selection delighted Latino voters, a fast-growing demographic bloc which helped power Obama's 2008 election win, and put a political squeeze on Republicans as they gear up for a bruising Senate confirmation process.

"I have decided to nominate an inspiring woman who I believe will make a great justice, Judge Sonia Sotomayor of the great state of New York," Obama said at the White House.

Obama said he had searched for a candidate of "rigorous intellect" who understood judges should interpret and not make law.

"She's faced down barriers, overcome the odds, and lived out the American dream," Obama said of Sotomayor, 54, who nurtured a taste for justice by reading Nancy Drew detective novels as a child.

"She has never forgotten where she began, never lost touch with the community that supported her," Obama said, noting that Sotomayor, a New York Yankees fan, is famed for a ruling that ended the 1994-95 Major League Baseball strike.

"What Sonia will bring to the court, then, is not only the knowledge and experience acquired over a course of a brilliant legal career, but the wisdom accumulated from an inspiring life's journey."

If confirmed, Sotomayor, who has spent 11 years on the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, will replace retiring Justice David Souter.

Sotomayor, who was born to a Puerto Rican family in the Bronx and lost her father at age nine, said she had far exceeded her childhood dreams.

"I am an ordinary person who has been blessed with extraordinary opportunities and experiences," she said.

Sotomayor vowed to uphold cherished principles laid down by America's founding fathers, but also to consider how her rulings affect ordinary people.

"I strive never to forget the real world consequences of my decisions on individuals, businesses and government."

Obama called on Republicans to give Sotomayor a fair hearing, brandishing the power conferred by his electoral mandate.

"I hope the Senate acts in a bipartisan fashion, as it has in confirming Judge Sotomayor twice before, and as swiftly as possible," he said, referring to his selection's previous Senate vetting processes for lower courts.

The president was under pressure to pick a woman and a minority, for a body long dominated by white males, and reportedly worked off a shortlist of four female picks.

Hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee are expected by July to allow a full vote on Sotomayor before the court's new term begins in October.

Reaction to Sotomayor's nomination was swift.

Patrick Leahy, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Judiciary committee said Sotomayor's record was "exemplary" and she had enjoyed a "long and distinguished career on the federal bench."

The Senate's top Republican Mitch McConnell promised fair treatment for Sotomayor, but vowed to "thoroughly examine her record" to ensure her personal political views would not stop her applying the law "even-handedly."

Scholar Roger Pilon of the libertarian Cato Institute, slammed Sotomayor as "the most radical of all the frequently mentioned candidates before" Obama.

"There will likely be an extremely contentious confirmation battle ahead," he said.

Wendy Long, counsel to the Judicial Confirmation Network, also hit out at the selection.

"Judge Sotomayor ... thinks that judges should dictate policy, and that one's sex, race, and ethnicity ought to affect the decisions one renders from the bench."

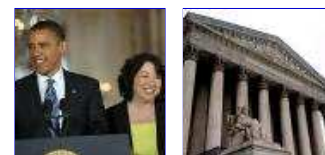
Many experts expect however, that absent personal or ethical revelations about Sotomayor, who has a liberal record on the bench, Democrats will prevail, given their large majority in the Senate.



Photo 1 of 5



Sonia Sotomayor will be the second woman currently on the nine-judge panel



## Map



