

Valdes sworn in as state's first Latina county prosecutor

Thursday, August 20, 2009

Last updated: Thursday August 20, 2009, 9:27 PM

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The Record

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Governor Corzine and his chief rival, Chris Christie, briefly stopped attacking each other on Thursday in order to heap praise on Camelia M. Valdes as she was sworn in as Passaic County prosecutor.

Corzine held the Bible as he delivered the oath of office to his appointee, Valdes, as she became New Jersey's first Latina county prosecutor. The governor said he picked Valdes because he favors ethnic diversity in government and because "she embraces excellence."



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Christie also had a major hand in Valdes' career: He hired her in 2001 as an assistant federal prosecutor.

"She reveres the law and she is an individual who believes in equality under the law," Corzine told a packed auditorium at the Passaic County Technical Institute in Wayne.

Christie also had a major hand in Valdes' career. He hired her in 2001 as an assistant federal prosecutor, when he was in charge of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark. Christie said Valdes invited him to speak at the ceremony.

Christie commended Corzine for what he termed a "wise choice" in appointing her as county prosecutor. The Republican

challenger added that when he took over as U.S. attorney there was a “significant lack” of minorities in the legal profession. He said the justice system has to make sure that “the door is open to everyone.”

There was no verbal sparring between Corzine and Christie, who shared the stage amid their increasingly angry campaign. The moment clearly belonged to Valdes, who sat next to the governor, clutching the hand of her husband, Frank. She spent most of her speech thanking her family and her colleagues — she cited the Hispanic Bar Association and her sorority — but steered clear of taking sides in the gubernatorial race.

She opened with a quote from the Bible (“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad”), then thanked members of the state Legislature for approving her appointment. But she reserved her most heartfelt remarks for her parents and in-laws, who were seated in the front row. At one point, she became choked up when she mentioned her father-in-law.

“You taught me that integrity, hard work and character were the cornerstones of success,” she said.

Corzine gives the oath of office to Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia



Valdes as her husband Frank, left, looks on. As an attorney, Valdes said, she was most proud of the fact that she could be a tough prosecutor, yet remain compassionate. She mentioned that over the years, several inmates she prosecuted later complimented her for her fairness. She promised to be both tough and compassionate as

Passaic County prosecutor.

“Some people deserve to go to jail, and others end up there because of a mistake in judgment,” she said.

Valdes acknowledged that she was proud to be New Jersey’s first Latina county prosecutor, but wants to move beyond being a symbol of Latino advancement. “I hope it is by the work that I do that I am measured,” she said. “Not by my age, gender or ethnicity. I promise to work hard for the people of Passaic County and always maintain my integrity.”