



## **Do it for Olga: State Senate must pass farm labor bill to honor trailblazer Mendez**

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New York marks the death of Olga Mendez, a feisty maverick who became the first Puerto Rican woman elected to a state legislature on the mainland and represented East Harlem in Albany for 26 years.

Mendez won a state Senate seat in 1978 and held the post through 2004, toward the end switching from Democrat to Republican.

Among the causes she championed was equal labor rights for New York's farmworkers, an issue that drew the unlikely attention of a politician representing parts of Manhattan and the Bronx when she discovered that some of her constituents were traveling to western New York to toil in the fields.

Improvements in the farmworkers' lot, such as the right to drinking water and toilets and the end of a lower minimum wage, started with Mendez. Now, broader legislation to guarantee full labor rights to New York farmworkers, including the right to organize and bargain collectively, is on the cusp of victory. The Assembly has passed it. Gov. Paterson wants to sign it. A bipartisan majority of Mendez's old Senate colleagues are in favor. They should honor her memory by passing the bill.