

## State justice notes progress for Hispanics, others

By Rafael Guerrero / Yakima Herald-Republic [rguerrero@yakimaherald.com](mailto:rguerrero@yakimaherald.com)

TOPPENISH, Wash. —

Were future lawyers, judges, justices among the audience Thursday when state Supreme Court Justice Steven González spoke at Heritage University? González certainly hoped so.

Students, staff and faculty welcomed González as he addressed his upbringing, career, the adversity he's faced as a Hispanic in law, and the progress by underrepresented groups seeking high positions.

For close to an hour, González regaled the crowd with colorful stories, like the time he was mistaken for a valet after his Supreme Court appointment or the bewildered look from a dental assistant when she found out he was a judge. He said he answered both situations with snarky remarks he isn't too proud of.

González admitted his stories often sound angry and people have asked him why that is. To the audience Thursday, he replied in trademark blunt fashion.

"I think it's the wrong question," he said. "I think the right question is why do you keep p..... me off?"

González is the second Latino and minority justice in the court's history. In November 2011, he was appointed by then-Gov. Chris Gregoire to the state Supreme Court to replace the retiring Gerry Alexander. The following summer, he won his first six-year term with 58 percent of the vote in the primary runoff, beating attorney Bruce Danielson. He ran unopposed in the general election.

However, González said he has never forgotten the controversy surrounding the runoff as Danielson neither campaigned nor spent money, yet grabbed 42 percent of the vote and the majority of the counties. As he has mentioned in previous public appearances and did so again, González believes some voted against him because of his last name. But he is hopeful for the future. As one audience member noted, six of the nine Supreme Court justices are women. And Sonia Sotomayor sits on the U.S. Supreme Court as the first Hispanic justice. And Barack Obama is the first African-American president.

“I absolutely think we are making progress,” he said.

“I think every year it’s getting better. Each one of us in this room is making it better. The fact we’re talking about it, for me, is therapy.”

After the meeting, González and Heritage University gave one final announcement: The state Supreme Court will be holding court at the Toppenish campus in March.