



Image courtesy of the Member

Charles A. Gonzalez

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1999–
DEMOCRAT FROM TEXAS

As a former judge, Charles Gonzalez has a unique, straight-forward way of finding common ground in the U.S. House of Representatives. “I’m not for pomp and circumstance,” he said in 2001. “Let’s get into the nitty-gritty and discuss our differences.”¹

Charles A. Gonzalez was born the third of eight children on May 5, 1945, in San Antonio, Texas, to Henry B. and Bertha González. As a child, he attended Catholic parochial schools while his father served in the San Antonio City Council and then in the state senate. When Charlie Gonzalez was in high school, his father became the first Mexican American from Texas elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. (He is the longest-serving Hispanic American in congressional history, 1961–1999.) With his father in Washington, the younger Gonzalez remained in San Antonio, and after graduating from Thomas A. Edison High School, he attended the University of Texas, Austin, receiving a bachelor of arts degree in government in 1969. Three years later he earned a law degree from St. Mary’s School of Law in San Antonio. From 1969 to 1975, Gonzalez was also a reservist in the Texas Air National Guard.² He is divorced, with a son, Leo, from his previous marriage.

Gonzalez spent one year teaching school before practicing law in the private sector for roughly a decade. In 1983 he became a municipal court judge before being elected to the Bexar County Court at Law. After five years as a county judge, Gonzalez was elected to the bench of Texas’ 57th District Court and served from 1988 until 1997.³ When Henry B. González announced his retirement from national politics in 1997, Charlie Gonzalez resigned his judgeship to campaign for his father’s seat. Texas’ traditionally Democratic and predominantly Hispanic 20th District cuts a diagonal through the city of San Antonio, encompassing much of the downtown area, including the Alamo, before stretching south and westward into the suburbs.⁴ The 1998 election featured a crowded Democratic primary, and after Gonzalez captured the party nod in the runoff election, he defeated his Republican challenger in the general election by nearly 30 percent.⁵ Since his first victory more than a decade ago, Gonzalez has faced little competition in either primary or general elections.⁶

Gonzalez has sat on multiple committees during his career in the House: Banking and Financial Services (later renamed Financial Services, 106th–108th Congresses, 1999–2005); Small Business (106th–110th Congresses, 1999–2009), where from 2007 to 2009 he chaired the Subcommittee on Regulation,

Healthcare and Trade; Energy and Commerce (108th–112th Congresses, 2003–2013); House Administration (110th–112th Congresses, 2007–2013); Judiciary (111th Congress, 2009–2011); and the Select Committee on Homeland Security (108th Congress, 2003–2005).⁷

Gonzalez earned a reputation as a respected mediator in the national legislature, underscoring his efforts to protect the civil rights of individuals across the country.⁸ He has worked to protect homebuyers and family businesses in his district, especially small and independent health care providers. His work on behalf of the nation's Hispanic community has placed him in leadership positions across Capitol Hill, and his advocacy for Spanish-language telecommunications and support for the nation's education system have contributed to his popularity in Texas.⁹ "You don't make the public schools stronger by taking the funds away," Gonzalez told the *San Antonio Express-News* in 2001.¹⁰

With his no-frills approach to the national lawmaking process, Gonzalez was elected vice president of his class of first-term lawmakers in 1999. Shortly thereafter, the Democratic Party appointed him chairman of a task force investigating the results of the 2000 presidential election. He has also been an active member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), chairing its civil rights task force during the 107th Congress (2001–2003) and helping to organize opposition against several administration nominees. In addition, the CHC made him responsible for investigating claims that the 2000 Census inaccurately calculated the size of the country's minority population, a problem Gonzalez called "the civil rights issue of the decade."¹¹ In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), the CHC elected him chairman. He is also a member of the New Democrat Coalition, the 21st Century Health Care Caucus, the High Speed Rail Caucus, the Air Force Caucus, the Infrastructure and Transportation Caucus, and the Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus.¹²

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Charles A. Gonzalez," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

1 Gary Martin, "Bush Reaching to Other Side," 4 February 2001, *San Antonio Express-News*: A1.

- 2 Christopher Marquis, "Henry Gonzalez, 84; Served 37 Years in House," 29 November 2000, *New York Times*: A33; *Politics in America, 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1999): 1339; *Politics in America, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2009): 994; "Official Biography of Congressman Charlie A. Gonzalez," http://gonzalez.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=9 (accessed 4 August 2010).
- 3 "New District Judge," 9 January 1998, *San Antonio Express-News*: B3; *Politics in America, 2000*: 1339.
- 4 *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: CQ-Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 957; *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2005): 1634; *Almanac of American Politics, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2009): 1459–1460; *Politics in America, 2000*: 1339.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2000*: 1339.
- 6 *Politics in America, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2001): 994; *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2003): 990; *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2005): 1004; *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2007): 989; *Politics in America, 2010*: 993.
- 7 Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011): 725–726; *Politics in America, 2008*: 989.
- 8 Sherry Sylvester, "Son Steps Out of Dad's Shadow in Washington," 25 November 2001, *San Antonio Express-News*: A12; *Politics in America, 2000*: 1339; *Politics in America, 2002*: 994; *Politics in America, 2008*: 990; *Politics in America, 2010*: 993–994.
- 9 *Politics in America, 2004*: 990–991; *Politics in America, 2008*: 989–990.
- 10 Gary Martin, "Hispanic Caucus Will Meet Bush," 2 April 2001, *San Antonio Express-News*: A1.
- 11 Sherry Sylvester, "Census Tally Will Not Be Adjusted," 7 March 2001, *San Antonio Express-News*: A1.
- 12 *Politics in America, 2004*: 991; *Politics in America, 2008*: 989; "Official Biography of Congressman Charlie A. Gonzalez," http://gonzalez.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=9 (accessed 6 August 2010).