



Image courtesy of the Member

Raúl M. Grijalva 1948–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2003–
DEMOCRAT FROM ARIZONA

For Raúl Grijalva, serving in the U.S. House of Representatives is about more than pursuing the interests of a particular constituency. “We are not only required to produce,” he said shortly after winning his third term in the House, “but we are required to lead.”¹ Grijalva has led by advocating for better educational opportunities and by becoming one of the most prominent environmentalists in Congress.

During World War II, Grijalva’s father immigrated to the United States from Mexico as part of the Bracero labor program, an agreement between the two countries permitting U.S. farmers to hire Mexican workers to remedy the wartime labor shortage.² Sponsored by an employer, his father became an American citizen, married, and settled in Tucson, Arizona. Raúl M. Grijalva was born in Tucson on February 19, 1948, and grew up in the southwest side of the city. He graduated from Sunnyside High School in 1967 and attended the University of Arizona before withdrawing to marry Ramona F. Grijalva, a librarian.³ Early in his career, Grijalva was an active community organizer and social worker, and was later an assistant dean for Hispanic Student Affairs at the University of Arizona.⁴ In 1974 he won election to the governing board of the Tucson unified school district and served until 1986. In 1987 he returned to the University of Arizona and completed his bachelor of arts degree in sociology. The following year, he won election to the Pima County board of supervisors and served as its chairman in 1997 and from 2001 to 2002.⁵ He and his wife have three daughters: Adelita, Raquel, and Marisa.

After Arizona gained two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives following the 2000 Census, Grijalva resigned from the Pima County board to run from the new 7th District. Located south of Phoenix and west of Tucson, the majority-Hispanic, Democratic-leaning district covered nearly 23,000 square miles and shared a 300-mile border with Mexico.⁶ Though part of the region’s economy is supported by seasonal farm labor, many residents live in Tucson and work for the University of Arizona. The district also contains seven American Indian reservations. “We’re a place where frontier crashed into frontier,” Grijalva said of his district in early 2002. “We have a history of being fairly diverse.”⁷ He ran on a platform advocating environmental protection, immigration reform, better access to education and health care, and economic stimulus.⁸ In the race for the House seat, Grijalva captured the party primary before taking the general election by more than 20 percent later that fall.⁹ “I am not one to avoid

traveling the path least traveled,” he said a few months before the election. “The personal risk is well worth the community reward.”¹⁰ Since his first victory in 2002, he has run unopposed in every Democratic primary and has won each subsequent general election.¹¹

In the House, Grijalva continues to champion the issues he supported during his time in local government, including education, labor, and the environment, and his committee assignments have bolstered his legislative activities. For his entire congressional career, starting in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Grijalva has sat on the Committee on Education and Labor and the Committee on Natural Resources.¹² He has worked to overhaul the nation’s immigration policy, advocating for the Safe, Orderly, Legal Visas and Enforcement Act (SOLVE), and has sought to fully fund education programs for the families of seasonal workers and non-native English speakers. Grijalva has also successfully introduced bills returning nearly 16,000 acres to four American Indian tribes in his district and spurring economic development on tribal lands.¹³ He joined the Committee on Small Business during the 109th and 110th Congresses (2005–2009), and in 2007 he became the chairman of Natural Resources’ Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. While chairman, he sought to maintain funding for the country’s national parks and worked to protect public lands and their resources.¹⁴

Grijalva has co-chaired the Congressional National Landscape Conservation Caucus and previously chaired the Democratic Environmental Task Force Caucus from 2003 to 2006.¹⁵ A member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), Grijalva served as its first vice chairman at the start of the 110th Congress (2007–2009).¹⁶ Grijalva has served as co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus since the start of the 111th Congress (2009–2011).

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Raúl M. Grijalva,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 Josh Brodesky, “Grijalva Stands to Gain More Influence,” 24 November 2006, *Arizona Daily Star*.
- 2 Nicole Santa Cruz, “He’s Standing His Ground: An Arizona Lawmaker Feels the Backlash after Calling for a Boycott of His

State,” 25 May 2010, *Los Angeles Times*: A8; Gilbert Paul Carrasco, “Bracero Program,” in Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. González, eds., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 220–221.

- 3 *Politics in America, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2009): 46; Garry Duffy, “Grijalva Resigns County Job,” 6 February 2002, *Tucson Citizen*: C1.
- 4 “Official Biography of Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva,” <http://grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=87§iontree=2,87> (accessed 16 March 2010); *Almanac of American Politics, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2003): 121; *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2003): 42.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2009): 45.
- 6 *Almanac of American Politics, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2009): 105.
- 7 Michael Lafleur, “Tucson Living King’s Dream,” 21 January 2002, *Tucson Citizen*: A1.
- 8 Duffy, “Grijalva Resigns County Job”; “Ask the Candidates; Topics: Immigrants, Economy,” 11 August 2002, *Arizona Daily Star*: A7.
- 9 *Politics in America, 2004*: 42.
- 10 Duffy, “Grijalva Resigns County Job.”
- 11 *Politics in America, 2010*: 45.
- 12 In the 108th Congress, the names of these panels were the Education and the Workforce Committee and the Resources Committee, respectively. When Democrats won the House majority at the start of the 110th Congress in 2007, they were renamed Education and Labor and Natural Resources. When Republicans regained the House majority for the 112th Congress in 2011, Education and Labor was again renamed Education and the Workforce; the Natural Resources name remained unchanged.
- 13 Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Two Sides of Political Reality for New Lawmakers,” 30 June 2003, *New York Times*: A14; Luke Turf, “Grijalva Unveils Immigration Reform,” 5 May 2004, *Tucson Citizen*: A7; C. T. Revere, “Grijalva Gets 1st Bill through House,” 29 September 2004, *Tucson Citizen*: A4; *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2005): 47–48; *Politics in America, 2010*: 45.
- 14 C. T. Revere, “Bush Plan for Forest Land Irks Grijalva, Activists,” 3 December 2002, *Tucson Citizen*: A7; “Official Biography of Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva,” <http://grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=87§iontree=2,87> (accessed 16 March 2010); *Almanac of American Politics, 2010*: 106.
- 15 “Official Biography of Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva,” <http://grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=87§iontree=2,87> (accessed 16 March 2010).
- 16 *Politics in America, 2010*: 45.