



Image courtesy of the Member

Luis V. Gutierrez

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1993–
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

Luis Gutierrez has a straightforward approach to the national lawmaking process, especially when it comes to the country's immigration policy. "The value of getting something done that is not worthy of our immigrants is not anything," he told the *Chicago Tribune* in 2007. "It's more important to get it done right."¹

Luis Vicente Gutierrez was born on December 10, 1953, in Chicago, Illinois, the first of two children. His father drove taxicabs, and his mother worked in a factory. The Gutierrezes, who hailed from Puerto Rico, moved the family back to the island after Luis's freshman year of high school in 1968. After completing his early education, he enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico.²

While visiting friends in Chicago in the early 1970s, Gutierrez decided to transfer to Northeastern Illinois University. He graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English in 1974 and returned to Puerto Rico, where he married Soraida Arocho and began teaching elementary school. He moved back to Chicago in 1978, taking a job as a social worker with the Illinois state department of children and family services. He left in 1983 to run for a position on the city council, losing that election before being hired by the Chicago mayor's office to work on infrastructure issues.³ Gutierrez and his wife have two daughters: Omaira and Jessica.

In 1985 Gutierrez lived in a new ward, cofounded a grass-roots political organization, and embarked on another run for city council. The race involved a recount and a runoff, but Gutierrez prevailed and quickly became a force on the council for the next six years, championing "affordable housing, tougher ethics rules, and a law to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation."⁴ He was named chairman of the council's housing committee and was appointed the board's president pro tempore.⁵

Gutierrez ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives after Illinois redrew its district boundaries following the 1990 Census. Chicago's 4th District was famously "C-shaped"—some observers said it resembled "a snake or a pair of earmuffs"—and linked the city's two major Hispanic neighborhoods.⁶ Inhabited by a mixture of white-collar and blue-collar residents working in transportation and manufacturing, the district as a whole was, and remains, overwhelmingly Democratic. Gutierrez announced his candidacy in late 1991 and won the Democratic primary in March of 1992. He promised to "commit . . . to being a commuter congressman," keeping his focus on Chicago

rather than on “the back rooms of Washington, D.C.” His platform included causes he had dealt with on the city council, including affordable housing, drug awareness, crime prevention, and tax policy.⁷ With no incumbent in the race, Gutierrez dominated the general election, taking 76 percent of the vote.⁸ Since 1992, Gutierrez has often run unopposed in the Democratic primary and has faced little competition in the general election.

Gutierrez has served on multiple committees in the House: the Committee on Financial Services (103rd–112th Congresses, 1993–2013); the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (103rd–109th Congresses, 1993–2007); the Committee on Foreign Affairs (103rd Congress, 1993–1995); the Judiciary Committee (110th–111th Congresses, 2007–2011); and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (112th Congress, 2011–2013). His tenure on Financial Services has been marked by steady advancement. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Gutierrez was chairman of the Committee on Financial Services’ Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade, and Technology. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011) he served as chairman of Financial Services’ Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit.⁹

Such assignments have allowed Gutierrez to pursue an ambitious legislative agenda, working to improve the nation’s immigration policy, protecting the victims of sexual assault, and maintaining funding for health care research. He has also sought to combat congestion on Chicago’s roadways by bolstering the city’s mass transit services. Gutierrez has had perhaps his biggest influence on the Financial Services Committee, contributing to the overhaul of the nation’s banking industry by shaping the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform Act and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Gutierrez has been an active member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) during his time in Washington, spearheading its Immigration Task Force and encouraging minority employment throughout the banking sector.¹⁰ Immigration reform has become a primary cause; Gutierrez once referred to it as his “unfinished business.”¹¹

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Luis V. Gutierrez,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 Jim Tankersly, “Gutierrez’s Last Immigration Stand,” 21 May 2007, *Chicago Tribune*: C1.
- 2 Jorge Casuso and Ben Joravsky, “‘El Gallito’: Luis Gutierrez Carves a Major Role for Himself in Chicago Politics,” 4 June 1989, *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine*: C10.
- 3 Casuso and Joravsky, “‘El Gallito’: Luis Gutierrez Carves a Major Role for Himself in Chicago Politics.”
- 4 For more on the election, see Teresa Córdova, “Harold Washington and the Rise of Latino Electoral Politics in Chicago, 1982–1987,” in David Montejano, ed., *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999): 31–57. “Official Biography of Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez,” http://www.gutierrez.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=450&Itemid=24 (accessed 23 April 2012).
- 5 For more on Gutierrez’s council district and his term in office, see David K. Fremon, *Chicago Politics Ward by Ward* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988): 171–178; Casuso and Joravsky, “‘El Gallito’: Luis Gutierrez Carves a Major Role for Himself in Chicago Politics.”
- 6 Thomas Hardy, “Former Ald. Soliz Joins Crowded Congress Race,” 6 December 1991, *Chicago Tribune*: C4; John Kass, “Gutierrez Picks Up Daley’s Backing for Congress,” 10 December 1991, *Chicago Tribune*: C3; Melita Marie Garza, “Winner Sure to Make History in Hispanic District,” 28 September 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: C3.
- 7 Susan Kuczka, “Gutierrez Vows to Be ‘Commuter’ Congressman in Hispanic District,” 9 December 1991, *Chicago Tribune*: C3.
- 8 Melita Marie Garza, “‘Hispanic’ District Really Isn’t: 4th’s Voter Rolls Primarily White,” 5 February 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: C2; Steve Johnson, “Gutierrez Builds Big Lead Thanks to Non-Hispanics,” 5 March 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: C1; Steve Johnson, “Reynolds, Lipinski Win,” 18 March 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: C1; Steve Johnson, “Gutierrez Breezes to Victory,” 4 November 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: N1; “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.
- 9 See also Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011): 739.
- 10 “Official Biography of Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez,” http://www.gutierrez.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=450&Itemid=24 (accessed 23 April 2012).
- 11 As quoted in *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: CQ–Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 320–321.