

STATEMENT
GONZALEZ.

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Joshua S. Gottheimer
11/29/2000 03:53:05 PM



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To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message
cc: Terry Edmonds/WHO/EOP@EOP, Mara A. Silver/WHO/EOP@EOP, Nanda Chitre/WHO/EOP@EOP
Subject: revised statement on Gonzalez

----- Forwarded by Joshua S. Gottheimer/WHO/EOP on 11/29/2000 03:52 PM -----



Joshua S. Gottheimer
11/29/2000 03:43:41 PM



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Subject: statement on Gonzalez

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Congressman Henry Gonzalez.

Congressman Gonzalez was a trailblazer and a leader for all of Texas. From his election to the San Antonio City Council and the Texas Senate to his successful career in Congress, Henry spent more than 40 years serving his state and his country. He was the first Hispanic to serve in the Texas State Senate in more than 100 years, and the first Mexican-American elected from Texas to serve in Congress.

As Chairman of the House Banking Committee, Congressman. Gonzalez championed the issues of hard-pressed Americans, fighting tirelessly for economic justice, civil rights, banking reform and affordable housing. His work over the decades was recognized with countless honors and awards -- including the 1994 John F Kennedy Profiles in Courage award. Henry will forever be remembered as a man of conviction and humility who devoted his life to lifting people up and building bridges of understanding.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to his wife, Bertha, his children his family and friends.

----- Forwarded by Joshua S. Gottheimer/WHO/EOP on 11/29/2000 03:02 PM -----



Victoria L. Valentine
11/29/2000 02:15:14 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Joshua S. Gottheimer/WHO/EOP@EOP, Mara A. Silver/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: Nanda Chitre/WHO/EOP
Subject: Re: draft press statement on Gonzalez

speechwriting --
please see stmt below, pleas take a look at this and edit as necessary, thanks

----- Forwarded by Victoria L. Valentine/WHO/EOP on 11/29/2000 02:13 PM -----

ERICA R. MORRIS
11/29/2000 01:16 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Victoria L. Valentine/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: Lisa M. Kountoupes/WHO/EOP@EOP, Rebecca Hunter/WHO/EOP@EOP, Lauren K. Gillespie/WHO/EOP@EOP
Subject: Re: draft press statement on Gonzalez

----- Forwarded by Erica R. Morris/WHO/EOP on 11/29/2000 01:16 PM -----

 Mark D. Magana
11/29/2000 01:14:38 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Erica R. Morris/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc:
bcc:
Subject: Re: draft press statement on Gonzalez 

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the death of former Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez.

Henry B. Gonzalez was a trailblazer and a leader for all of Texas. From his election to the San Antonio City Council and the Texas Senate to his successful career in Congress, Henry has spent more than 40 years honorably serving his constituents his state and his country. Henry was the first Hispanic to serve in the Texas State Senate in over 100 years and he made history as the first Mexican-American elected from Texas to serve in Congress. As Chairman of the House Banking Committee, Henry championed the issues of the poor and led the causes of bank reform and housing availability. Throughout his decades of public service, Henry fought tirelessly on economic issues, insisting that our country's prosperity should extend to all Americans. An outspoken man of courage, Chairman Gonzalez's bold leadership of the Banking Committee was

acknowledged by many through numerous honors and awards including the 1994 John F Kennedy Profiles in Courage award. Henry will long be remembered for his unwavering conviction and longstanding commitment to integrity.

Congressman Gonzalez was a great teacher, Representative, and human being. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his wife, Bertha, his children, including his son Representative Charlie Gonzalez, and to his many family and friends.

ERICA R. MORRIS

ERICA R. MORRIS

11/29/2000 11:42:01 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Mark D. Magana/WHO/EOP@EOP, Lisa M. Kountoupes/WHO/EOP@EOP

cc: Rebecca Hunter/WHO/EOP@EOP, Lauren K. Gillespie/WHO/EOP@EOP

Subject: draft press statement on Gonzalez



statement on Henry Gonzalez 112900.d

Message Sent To

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HENRY B. GONZÁLEZ



[Office of Representative González]

United States Representative Democrat of Texas

*Eighty-seventh - One Hundred Fourth Congresses
November 4, 1961 - Present*

A strong personality who has received national attention for his various crusades, Henry González was the first Hispanic Representative from Texas, and has served in Congress longer than any other Hispanic. He was born Enrique Barbosa González in San Antonio, Texas on May 3, 1916. His parents, Leonides González Cigarroa and Genoveva Barbosa Prince de González, fled to San Antonio from the state of Durango in northern Mexico during the Mexican Revolution in 1911. Leonides González had served as mayor of the town of Mapimi, Durango in Mexico. Henry González attended public schools and graduated from Jefferson High School in 1935. He continued his education at the University of Texas and San Antonio College. In 1943 he graduated from St. Mary's University School of Law. Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was called to government service and worked as a civilian cable and radio censor for military and naval intelligence. After graduation he worked as assistant juvenile probation officer, quickly rising to chief probation officer of the Bexar County Juvenile Court. In 1947 he was hired by the Pan American Progressive Association as executive assistant. From 1947 to 1951 he helped his father run a translation service in San Antonio.

In 1953, with the support of Mexican-Americans and Anglos, González was elected to the San Antonio City Council, serving as mayor pro-tempore for part of his first term. In the city council he spoke against segregation of public facilities, and the council passed desegregation ordinances. In 1956 he was elected to the State Senate; he was subsequently reelected and served until 1961. In 1957 González, along with Senator Abraham Kazen, attracted national attention for holding the longest filibuster in the history of the Texas Legislature, which lasted thirty-six hours. They succeeded in killing eight out of ten racial segregation bills that were aimed at circumventing the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Among his other achievements in the Senate were a slum clearance law and the passage of a bill for the creation of a medical school. In 1958 González unsuccessfully ran for Governor of Texas; although an unlikely candidate, he wanted to offer an alternative to the race between Governor Daniel and former governor W. Lee O'Daniel.

During the 1960 presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy requested González's help in organizing Viva Kennedy Clubs throughout the country. González and U.S. Senator Dennis Chávez of New Mexico served as national co-chairmen.

González was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Paul J. Kilday (D-TX), who had been appointed to the Court of Military Appeals. In 1961 he was elected with over half of the votes. Subsequently he has faced little challenge in reelection bids; he has generally won with at least eighty percent of the vote and a number of times he has run unopposed. Although he has supported and initiated legislation for the welfare of Hispanics, he has never run on a Hispanic platform.

As a Representative, González quickly got attention in 1963. He received substantial publicity when he voted against additional appropriations for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, because it received more money than other committees that produced more reports and legislation.

During his first term, González was assigned to the Committee on Banking and Currency, which in 1977 became the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee, where he worked for the passage of a number of legislative proposals of the New Frontier and Great Society including the Housing Act of 1964. He worked on legislation that was eventually incorporated into the Equal Opportunities Act of 1964, and supported the Library Service Act of 1964, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition, Chairman Wright Patman (D-TX) appointed González as a special liaison representative on Latin-American affairs; González attended the Inter-American Development Bank Board of Directors conference in Panama in April 1964. During the 1960's he also campaigned to put an end to the *bracero* program, which allowed the use of foreign labor to harvest agricultural crops. He criticized the program for the deplorable conditions under which laborers worked.

In the 1970's González continued with his crusades. In 1977 he gained national attention as Chairman of the House Assassinations Committee that was established to investigate the murders of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. Animosity developed between González and the attorney who headed the probe. González quit within weeks, due to the fact that in his opinion the investigation was doomed because powerful forces in organized crime were against it. He also urged an investigation of the murder of Judge John W. Wood in San Antonio. When the indictments were handed down, Federal prosecutors thanked González for his perseverance. As a member of the House Small Business Committee in the 94th Congress, González served as Chairman of the ad hoc subcommittee on the Robinson-Patman Act, Anti-trust Legislation, and Related Matters. He played a key role in salvaging the Robinson-Patman Act, which some consider to be the "Magna Carta" of small business. During the 1970's González opposed nuclear power and introduced legislation to phase out existing nuclear facilities, and continued his work in support of public housing.

In 1981 González became the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, where he worked on legislation to approve a program to assist families who faced foreclosure on their homes. Later he battled the Reagan administration when it proposed cuts in public housing programs.

With the leadership of González as Chairman of the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee, the committee was able to enact many pieces of legislation, including flood insurance reform, major housing initiatives, increasing the accessibility to credit to small business, and strengthening anti-money laundering laws, bank fraud, and other financial crimes. In addition, through his efforts with legislation and through hearings, he succeeded in making the Federal Reserve more publicly accountable. During his ten year Chairmanship (1971-1981) of the Banking Committee's Subcommittee on International Development

Institutions, and Finance, he sponsored an amendment to a number of international banking bills. The "González amendment," as it was commonly known, protects U.S. citizens from expropriation by countries that receive loans from international development institutions to which the U.S. contributes.

During his tenure as Chairman of the Banking Committee, González had to deal with the collapse of the savings and loan industry, a crisis he had predicted throughout the 1980's. In 1991 he led a restructuring of the federal deposit insurance system. As Chairman he earned a reputation for being a fair leader who allowed equitable participation in the creation of bills.

González was once again in the national spotlight in 1992, when he requested an investigation of the Bush administration's involvement in loans to Iraq.

In addition to his legislative career González has served seven times as a House Delegate to the Mexico-United States Interparliamentary Conference, and has received numerous awards from universities, including honorary doctorates from St. Mary's University and from Our Lady of the Lake College.

Publications by Henry B. González:

"The Relinquishment of Co-Equality by Congress." *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 29 (Summer 1992): pp. 331-356.

For further reading:

Ralph Nader Congress Project. *Henry B. González, Democratic Representative from Texas*. Washington, D.C., Grossman Publishers, 1972.

Rodríguez, Eugene. *Henry B. Gonzalez: A Political Profile*. New York: Arno Press, 1976.

"Profile of a Public Man." *Nuestro* 2:13 (March 1983).

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March/April, 1998

Congressman Henry Gonzalez

By Winton Pitcoff

One of Congress' leading advocates for the poor and for an open government prepares to leave after 18 terms.

It's rare for U.S. Representative Henry Gonzalez to not follow through on a promise, but in late 1997 he did just that.

He didn't retire in December after all, as he had announced he would earlier in the year.

The 18-term Democratic Congressman from Texas had said that poor health would force him to leave his seat at the end of the year, a seat he has held for 36 years. But in rethinking his decision he felt it improper to pass along the costs of a special election to taxpayers and instead announced he would stick it out until the end of his term and not run for re-election this November.

That kind of thinking isn't unusual for Gonzalez, say the people around him. He has always placed great value on the responsibility with which his constituents have entrusted him election after election, and the idea of betraying that trust by stepping down early ran counter to that belief. So through the end of the 105th Congress, he'll continue playing the role he has crafted for himself and fills well—that of the populist voice for the disenfranchised, the progressive voice against secrecy and domination by government, and the eloquent voice in support of aid for the poor.

Gonzalez began his political career in 1953 when he became the first Mexican-American elected to the San Antonio City Council, and then broke similar ground when he was elected to the Texas State Senate. In 1962 he became the first Mexican-American from Texas to be elected to the U.S. Congress. He has never liked such tokenistic labels, though, preferring to be known simply as an American.

An Early Advocate for Housing

Gonzalez's commitment to housing began long before his first election. As a college student he worked on a successful campaign to bring public housing to San Antonio, and eventually became deputy director of that city's Housing Authority in charge of development and family relocation. Once elected to Congress, Gonzalez worked with President Johnson on the Model Cities program and successfully won Model City designation for San Antonio.

As Chairman of the Housing Subcommittee of the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services—the only Housing Subcommittee Chairman who had worked for a public housing authority—Gonzalez presided over the nation's housing and community development policy during the Reagan and Bush administrations. Time and again, he clashed with those presidents and their appointees as

they attempted to cut funding for programs. Despite the intransigence of such officials, most notably Reagan's HUD Secretary Samuel Pierce, Gonzalez succeeded in shepherding several key pieces of legislation through passage in the 80s, including the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, and the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act, which boosted federal funding for housing programs, including some new programs such as Housing for People With AIDS (HOPWA).

His work in housing did not go unnoticed. Among the recognitions he received were the 1991 National Alliance to End Homelessness Award for Public Sector Achievement, the 1997 Fair Housing Award, and a Housing Assistance Council Special Award in 1996. In 1990, Shelterforce bestowed Gonzalez with a 100 percent score in a Housing Scorecard, ranking members of Congress based upon their voting records on housing legislation.

"We never needed to lobby him," recalled veteran housing activist Cushing Dolbeare, "because he was always on our side already." He often went out of his way to listen to what housing advocates had to say about pending legislation, and almost always supported their campaigns, she said.

Forcing Open the Fed

A staunch champion of full disclosure from financial institutions, Gonzalez was responsible for the Homeownership and Equity Protection Act of 1994, designed to curb creditors' practices of "reverse redlining," by which lenders would target disadvantaged communities for credit on unfair terms, including high-rate/high-fee home equity loans. As Chairman of the full House Committee on Banking and Financial Services, Gonzalez was responsible for "de-mystifying the Federal Reserve more than anybody in history," says Representative Barney Frank (D-MA). "He substantially changed the way the Fed operates, particularly in the way they release information to the public, in that he forced them to open minutes and decisions."

Gonzalez's call for the removal of Federal Reserve Chair Paul Volker "gave him a forum to address what he thought were honest grievances" about the excessive powers the Fed had gathered through independence and secrecy, said Frank DeStefano, a Congressional staffer who worked with Gonzalez for many years. (Gonzalez's staff says he is no longer granting interviews.)

Gonzalez's passion for openness in government went beyond banking, and he worked tirelessly to investigate and bring to light cover-ups, conspiracies, and government gaffes. He established committees to investigate the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, led investigations into the administrations of presidents Reagan and Bush, ultimately calling for impeachment hearings for the two, and was involved in the initial hearings around President Clinton's Whitewater affair. He was active in the investigations into the S&L crisis of the 1980s as well.

Such efforts were meant to shed light on the inner workings of government in order to make the system more accountable to the people who elect officials. Gonzalez is unique because of his "basic belief that the first and foremost thing for an elected official is the relationship to the people in his district and their needs," said DeStefano. His office doors in both Washington and San Antonio are adorned with signs proclaiming "This office belongs to the people of the 20th Congressional District, Texas."

Changing Lives of Americans

Gonzalez is "one of the few people who live by their beliefs on a daily basis and put them into practice" said DeStefano. "You couldn't find a person more committed to helping the poor and the working man."

Known for his feistiness-stories of Gonzalez resorting to fisticuffs are legendary in Congress-Gonzalez was not one to back down against the majority. His speeches in support of his commitment to the poor and disenfranchised have moved members of Congress to tears, and his frequent letters to colleagues in reproach of their conduct often made headlines, as did a missive to Jim Leach (R-IA) in 1994, in which he called the Congressman "obstinate," "disobedient," and "obdurate," among other things.

For his part, Leach was one of the key speakers at the unveiling of Gonzalez's portrait in Congress in October, 1997, and gave no indication of having let that letter diminish his view of Gonzalez as a peer. "I know of no more honorable member of Congress," he said. "Throughout his effective career in public service, Henry Gonzalez has changed for the better the lives of millions of AmericansÉ [and] has steadfastly stood up for those less advantaged in American life."

Although he went back on his word about stepping down early, Gonzalez says he is firmly committed to stepping down at the end of this year to enjoy more time with his 21 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The Republicans who saw him as a resilient thorn in their side for so many years are no doubt relieved, but will likely not believe it completely until he has actually left the building.

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CURRENCY

**The Committee on Banking and Financial Services
U.S House of Representatives, 105th Congress
James A. Leach, Chairman**

Phone: (202) 226-0471 Fax: (202) 226-6052 Internet: <http://www.house.gov/banking>

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, October 8, 1997

Contact: David Runkel or

Andrew Biggs 226-0471

**The Honorable James A. Leach
Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives
in tribute to Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez**

Mr. Speaker, I join my friends on the other side of the aisle to pay tribute to the Gentleman from San Antonio, Texas, Representative Henry B. Gonzalez. I know of no more honorable Member of Congress.

More than 40 years ago, Henry Gonzalez began a long and exemplary career in public service. He served on the San Antonio City Council and later in the Texas State Senate, where he was, at that time, the first person of Mexican decent to serve in that body in more than 100 years.

Elected to the 87th Congress on November 4, 1961, Henry has honorably and tirelessly served his constituents and his country for 35 years in the U.S. House of Representatives. A sign that has hung on the door of his office for many years sums up his perspective on the seat he has held in Congress. It reads: "This Office Belongs to the People of the 20th Congressional District, Texas."

In January, 1962, Henry was appointed to serve as a member of the Committee on Banking and Currency, which is known today as the Committee on Banking and Financial Services. There he served effectively and ably as the Chairman of the Housing Subcommittee from 1981 to 1994, and Chairman of the full Committee from 1989 to 1994.

When Henry became Chairman of the Banking Committee in 1989, the Nation was facing the most costly financial crisis in the history of the United States -- the half trillion dollar savings and loan debacle. Throughout this crisis, Henry Gonzalez led the Congress in enacting legislation to protect depositors, bring stability back to the beleaguered thrift industry, and restore the strength and integrity of the deposit insurance system. His leadership helped to avoid an even larger financial crisis with even more dire implications for the national economy. On the heels of enacting this legislation, Henry held numerous hearings to bring to light the abuses of some of the Nation's most notorious financiopathes.

An old fashioned liberal, Henry never had a conflict of interest. He did not simply advocate, he lived campaign reform. His only special interest was his constituents. He never let them down, nor did they ever countenance an alternative. Honesty has its rewards.

As a young Hispanic male in San Antonio, and later in his work as a social worker, Henry experienced and witnessed first-hand the effects of discrimination and the disenfranchisement of the poor.

The record of Henry's tenure as Chairman of the Housing Subcommittee illustrates his commitment to helping those in need. Under his direction, the Housing Subcommittee held the first hearing -- in January 1983 -- on the growing homeless population in the United States, which led in 1987 to the enactment of comprehensive legislation to address the needs of the homeless, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

As colleagues on the Banking Committee, Henry and I held differing positions on a number of issues -- particularly on matters involving the independence of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors -- but Congressman Gonzalez has been clearly right on certain of his efforts, including attempts to bring about more transparency in the operations of the Federal Reserve. He has also led Congress in efforts to uncover money laundering in various parts of the country, particularly in the San Antonio Federal Reserve District.

The legislative achievements of Henry Gonzalez -- spanning more than three decades of service in the Congress -- are far too numerous to mention during this special order. But the many public service awards and honors that have been bestowed upon him over the years, including the John F. Kennedy Profile In Courage Award, stand as testaments to the difference Henry Gonzalez has made.

It is often said that the true riches in one's life can be measured by the lives one has touched and changed for the better. Throughout his effective career in public service, Henry Gonzalez has changed for the better the lives of millions of Americans. Throughout his career in public service, Henry Gonzalez has steadfastly stood up for those less advantaged in American life. He has literally represented and improved the lives of millions. For his honorableness, for his commitment to basic values, for his remembrance of his own roots, we in this House this evening honor a giant of a man, Henry B. Gonzalez of Texas.

The Washington Post, November 29, 2000

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November 29, 2000, Wednesday, Final Edition

SECTION: METRO; Pg. B08

LENGTH: 748 words

HEADLINE: Henry Gonzalez, 37-Year Texas Representative, Dies; Democrat Served as Chairman of House Banking Committee, Was Revered as Champion of the Poor

BYLINE: Martin Weil, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

Henry B. Gonzalez, 84, the proudly populist, fiercely independent Texas Democrat who retired last year after 37 years in Congress, died Nov. 28 in San Antonio. He was taken to a hospital in the morning after feeling ill.

Rep. Gonzalez, the first person of Mexican American heritage to represent Texas in the House, was regarded by admirers as a feisty and fearless champion of the poor and downtrodden. He was seen as a legislator who was guided by a stubborn integrity and was unafraid of offending the powerful.

A prominent member of the Banking Committee, and its head for three terms, he gave close scrutiny to the operations of the Federal Reserve System, passed key housing legislation and was credited with helping to repair the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., as well as passing measures aimed at cleaning up the savings and loan scandal of the early 1990s.

Rep. Gonzalez also was a staunch foe of efforts to use the Banking Committee to hold hearings on the Whitewater matter--questions arising from an Arkansas land deal that plagued President Clinton throughout his administration.

Lest anyone doubt where he stood on the matter, Rep. Gonzalez called allegations made by Republicans an "array of half-truths, old rumors, half-baked conspiracy theories and outright lies."

He found Republican presidents more worthy of criticism. He proposed the impeachment of President Ronald Reagan after the 1983 Grenada invasion and the 1987 Iran-contra scandal. Dissatisfaction with what he viewed as encroachment on the war powers of Congress led him to call for the impeachment of President George Bush after the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Occasionally impetuous and sometimes short-tempered, Rep. Gonzalez could try the patience of even his fellow Democrats by his determination to blaze his own iconoclastic trail on Capitol Hill.

His legend originated partly from a couple of incidents in which he went beyond oratory to express his views. In 1963, he hit a Republican congressman who said Rep. Gonzalez had compiled a left-wing voting record that abetted socialism and communism. In 1986, he hit another man who called him a Red.

In November 1996, with the Republicans in control of the House and Rep. Gonzalez seeming less interested in the workings of the Banking Committee, members of his own party tried to dislodge him as ranking member of the panel.

But key supporters rallied to him. "This guy defines the Democratic Party's values," said then-Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy III, who called Rep. Gonzalez "a folk hero."

And in a memorable speech, Rep. Gonzalez struck a powerful blow for his own cause.

"I say to you, I have served with honor and integrity and success," he told the members of his party's caucus.

"And so I appeal to you. Do the right thing. Do the fair thing. I appeal to your sense of justice. One last term as ranking member and I will not disappoint you."

The caucus, composed of skeptics as well as admirers, broke into applause, and the Texan carried the day.

The San Antonio-born son of parents of Mexican heritage, Rep. Gonzalez honed his English as a young man through reading Carlyle and Stevenson. He studied at San Antonio College and at the University of Texas in Austin before World War II, in which he served in military intelligence. He held a law degree from St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

Becoming active in politics after the war, he made it to the San Antonio City Council, and he reached the Texas Senate in 1957, where he won attention with a 22-hour filibuster against a bill seen as a backdoor means of protecting school segregation.

He was trounced when he ran as a liberal in his party's gubernatorial primary in 1958, but he came back for more. In 1961, he entered two big races. The first was for the Senate seat vacated when Lyndon B. Johnson became vice president. That run failed badly. But later that year, a Democrat left the U.S. House to become a judge, and with the active backing of the John F. Kennedy administration and with firm support in Hispanic neighborhoods, Rep. Gonzalez got a ticket to Washington.

Rep. Gonzalez, who was called Henry B., insisted that his politics were not determined by his ethnic origins.

"I am a Democrat without prefix, suffix, apology or any other kind of modification," he said.

Ill health led to his retirement last year. His son, Rep. Charlie Gonzalez (D-Tex.), succeeded him.

He was married to Bertha Cuellar and had eight children.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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The New York Times, November 29, 2000

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November 29, 2000, Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

NAME: Henry B. Gonzalez

SECTION: Section A; Page 33; Column 4; National Desk

LENGTH: 876 words

HEADLINE: Henry Gonzalez, 84; Served 37 Years in House

BYLINE: By CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS

DATELINE: WASHINGTON, Nov. 28

BODY:

Former Representative **Henry B. Gonzalez**, a pugnacious and partisan Texas Democrat who used his perch as the chairman of the House banking committee to champion public housing and tighter controls over the savings and loan industry, died today in a San Antonio Hospital. He was 84 and lived in San Antonio.

Mr. Gonzalez, whose irascible manner and staunch defense of the downtrodden exasperated many colleagues but inspired his constituents to keep him in Congress for 37 years, died at Baptist Medical Center after he awoke feeling poorly, a family spokesman said.

The cause of death was not immediately determined, said the spokesman, Adrian Saenz.

Mr. Gonzalez, the child of Mexican immigrants, was an ardent supporter of desegregation in Texas and later became an avid admirer of President John F. Kennedy. During his long Congressional career, from 1961 to 1998, he led critical inquiries into the savings and loan scandal of the 1980's and into the Bush administration's dealings with Iraq before the Persian Gulf war.

But Mr. Gonzalez, a former college boxer, will also be remembered for his inclination to throw an occasional punch at detractors.

In a San Antonio restaurant, he heard himself referred to as a Communist by a much younger man. Mr. Gonzalez, who was 70 at the time, gave the man a black eye. He was later unrepentant.

That combative spirit fueled a famous feud with Samuel R. Pierce, Jr., the secretary of housing and urban development in the Reagan administration. Mr. Gonzalez fought for more low-cost housing at a time when Mr. Pierce sought to dismantle such federal programs.

A stocky, untelegenic politician who was partial to polyester suits and loud ties, Mr. Gonzalez occasionally took to the House floor for ruminations on abuses by the federal government. He sought the impeachment of two Republican presidents: Ronald Reagan, after the 1983 invasion of Grenada, and George Bush, in connection with the 1987 Iran-contra scandal.

He clashed again with Mr. Bush when he investigated accusations that the United States had sought to curry favor with President Saddam Hussein of Iraq by offering agricultural loan guarantees and access to technology with military applications.

Bush administration officials denied a role in strengthening President Hussein, whose 1990 invasion of Kuwait led to the Persian Gulf war.

Although Mr. Gonzalez was a fierce partisan, his investigation of the savings and loan industry was especially painful to Democrats. He exposed the efforts of Charles F. Keating, the director of Lincoln Savings and Loan to influence senators responsible for regulating the industry. Four of the so-called Keating Five senators implicated in the scandal were fellow Democrats.

Mr. Gonzalez drafted legislation to authorize a federal bailout of the savings and loan industry in 1989 and to impose new regulatory safeguards.

For all his contact with movers and shakers of the financial industry, Mr. Gonzalez prided himself on his honesty and independence.

He once claimed that he had shuffled through the muddy paths of politics at a local, state and national level but "I still haven't gotten the tips of my shoes dirty."

At times, Mr. Gonzalez's obstinacy was disruptive. In 1977, he abruptly resigned from leading a House investigation into the assassinations of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. After a bitter squabble with the panel's chief counsel, Mr. Gonzalez quit, asserting that elements of organized crime were succeeding in keeping the truth obscured.

Mr. Gonzalez was the first Mexican-American to represent Texas in Congress. But despite his pride in his heritage, he did not want to be identified solely by his ethnicity, and he dropped out of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Born in 1916 to recent immigrants from Mexico, Mr. Gonzalez was one of six children who grew up familiar with discrimination and poverty. He studied engineering for two years at the University of Texas but was forced to return home for lack of money during the Depression. He went on to earn a law degree at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, though he later took jobs working for his father's translation service. He once resigned from a position as a probation officer in juvenile court after he was prohibited from hiring a black employee.

Elected to the San Antonio City Council in 1953, Mr. Gonzalez won approval for a measure to desegregate city facilities. As a state senator, he led a 35-hour filibuster against bills favoring racial segregation.

He once said that he had few blacks in his district, but that the principle of equal access was worth defending. "If a bill violates the constitutional rights of even one person, then it has to be struck down," he said in 1992.

During his years in Washington, Mr. Gonzalez shunned the capital's social scene, preferring the comfort of a small apartment stuffed with books. His family never moved to Washington, so he commuted home most weekends.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Bertha, and eight sons and daughters: Henry B. Jr., Rosemary, Charlie, Bertha, Steven, Genevieve, Frank and Anna.

His son Charlie now represents the San Antonio district that Mr. Gonzalez held for so long.

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GRAPHIC: Photo: **Henry B. Gonzalez** (The New York Times, 1992)

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH