



Image courtesy of the Member

Rubén Hinojosa

1940–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1997–
DEMOCRAT FROM TEXAS

Since 1997, when he took over the House seat previously held by a powerful Democratic committee chairman, Rubén Hinojosa has been a tireless champion in the U.S. Congress for progressive education policy. “We must refocus our energies on the unfinished business of providing for the education of our youth,” he said in 2003, noting that Hispanic-American children were particularly at risk for being overlooked during national lawmaking. “If we do not invest in education and training for this emerging population, we put our nation’s economic foundation at risk.”¹

Rubén Hinojosa was born on August 20, 1940, the eighth of 11 children, raised by Mexican immigrants who settled in Edcouch, Hidalgo County, Texas. Hinojosa’s parents established a major food-distributing company in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Their leadership in the business sector soon made them a powerful force in the Mercedes community of south Texas.² English was a second language for the entire Hinojosa family, and Rubén attended a segregated elementary school in South Texas before graduating from Mercedes High School. Education became his lifelong obsession. Hinojosa enrolled at the University of Texas, Austin, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in business administration in 1962, and went on to earn a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Texas–Pan American in Edinburg in 1980. His first marriage ended in divorce. He is married to Martha Lopez Hinojosa and has five children: Rubén, Jr.; Laura; Iliana; Kaitlin; and Karén.³

After college, Hinojosa went to work for his family’s company, a prominent employer in the region, eventually serving as its chief executive. After a brief stint on the Mercedes school board from 1972 to 1974, Hinojosa was elected to the Texas state board of education, where he served until 1984. He returned to the University of Texas–Pan American as an adjunct professor in its business school and was elected chairman of the board for South Texas Community College in 1993.⁴

In early 1996, long-serving Texas Democrat Eligio (Kika) de la Garza announced his retirement from the U.S. House of Representatives. His predominantly rural and Hispanic 15th District stretched northward from the U.S. border with Mexico, curving up and to the east between San Antonio and Corpus Christi.⁵ Given Hinojosa’s prominent position in South Texas’ business community and his respected work on the board of education, he emerged as an early front-runner to replace the longtime chairman of the House Agriculture

Committee. He made education initiatives in South Texas his top campaign priority and promised to “support legislation that benefits the small and large businesses” throughout the Rio Grande Valley.⁶ In the race to fill the 15th District seat, Hinojosa failed to capture a majority in the Democratic primary but took the runoff election in early April 1996.⁷ Hinojosa cruised to an easy victory in the general election later that fall.⁸ Since 1996, he has either run unopposed or faced nominal opposition in the primary and general elections.

In the House, Hinojosa has spent the majority of his career on the Committee on Education and the Workforce (renamed the Committee on Education and Labor from 2007 to 2011) and the Committee on Financial Services. He has also served for briefer periods on the Small Business Committee (105th–107th Congresses, 1997–2003), the Resources Committee (108th Congress, 2003–2005), and the Foreign Affairs Committee (110th Congress, 2007–2009).⁹

When Democrats gained control of the House at the start of the 110th Congress, Hinojosa was appointed chairman of the Education and Labor Committee’s Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness. His leadership on national education policy has helped many of the country’s underprivileged communities gain access to better schools and resources, which he has long believed would generate broader economic stability. “We must have an educated work force if we are to build upon initiatives such as the Rio Grande Valley Empowerment Zone to enhance our economy and create jobs,” he said not long after winning his first election.¹⁰ In recognition of his efforts, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) named him chairman of its educational task force.¹¹ Hinojosa also has worked tirelessly to reform the country’s immigration policy to open paths to citizenship, and he has attempted to illuminate the inner workings of the country’s financial system.¹² In 2006 Hinojosa admitted that he probably works too much, “but I take my job very seriously,” he quickly followed up, “and approach it with passion.”¹³

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 Rubén Hinojosa, “Hispanics’ Prosperity Depends on Education: Key Programs Need More Money,” 3 September 2003, *The Hill*: 30.
- 2 “Footnotes,” 31 October 1999, *Houston Chronicle*: State, 2.
- 3 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; “Official Biography of Congressman Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://hinojosa.house.gov/biography> (accessed 10 May 2012); *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: CQ-Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 947; *Almanac of American Politics, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: University of Chicago Press, 2011): 1570–1571. See also Emily Cahn, “Hinojosa Puts Education First,” 6 April 2011, *The Hill*.
- 4 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; “Official Educational Biography of Congressman Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://hinojosa.house.gov/about-me/educational-biography> (accessed 10 May 2012); *Politics in America, 2012*: 947.
- 5 *Politics in America, 1998* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1997): 1404; *Politics in America, 2012*: 947.
- 6 Gary Martin, “Hinojosa to Seek Input on Education Proposal,” 18 February 1997, *San Antonio Express-News*: B1; Gary Martin, “Hinojosa Named to Education Committee,” 26 November 1996, *San Antonio Express-News*: A8.
- 7 Catalina Camia, “Primaries Set Stage for Fight to Control Congressional Delegation,” 11 March 1996, *Dallas Morning News*: A10; “Primary ’96,” 14 March 1996, *Houston Chronicle*: A36; Stefanie Scott, “Ex-Demo Laughlin Loses GOP Runoff Bid,” 10 April 1996, *San Antonio Express-News*: A1.
- 8 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.
- 9 Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011): 757.
- 10 Martin, “Hinojosa Named to Education Committee.”
- 11 *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2005): 994.
- 12 “Official Financial Literacy Biography of Rubén Hinojosa,” <http://hinojosa.house.gov/about-me/financial-literacy-biography> (accessed 10 May 2012); *Politics in America, 2012*: 947–948.
- 13 Cameron Joseph, “What Is Your Greatest Vice?,” 21 September 2006, *The Hill*: 24.