
CHAPTER FOUR:

“Congressional Leadership in Chicano Communities”

The Formation of Leaders in Minority Politics

The ideological shaping of Congressional leadership in minority communities resembles in many ways the political progression of Congressional leadership in *non*-minority communities: the formulation of political strategy is often directly linked to and influenced by the demographics and political ideology of the district at hand. The interest of the average voter across the United States is summarily piqued by a Congressional candidate who physically and politically resembles them.¹ That is, a district fundamentally comprised of Republican, conservative, white ethnics (as are many communities throughout the state of California) will most likely attract Congressional leadership fitting that same basic profile. The opposite is also generally true: a Congressional candidate hoping to win a seat in a district like the one described above will tailor his or her public image – as much as humanly attainable – to fit the political desires of that district’s constituents.²

Following this line of thought, one would assume that the same is true for Congressional districts comprised mainly of residents belonging to a minority group. However, given the fact that MCs representing any kind of community in the United States have traditionally been white ethnics, minority communities in the last few decades have been playing catch-up in the game of Congressional representation and

¹ The ability of a constituent to physically/culturally identify with his or her district’s MC is often referred to as “‘descriptive representation’ – that is, representation defined in terms of the characteristics of the representatives” (Polinard et al. 5).

² See Gay (718) as well as Smith’s Chapter 7, “Congress and the Constant Campaign: Survival Politics and the New Breed” (119-159), for thorough treatment of the meticulous customization of public image – or the “products of strategic calculation” (Gay 718) – in the modern political arena.

ethnic identification with MCs. Therefore, any scholarly research done on the minority representation in Congress of minority (as well as non-minority) communities is relatively recent and requires synthesis in order to be understood in the context of eclectic studies such as the present one. The thesis most commonly championed in this genre of investigation is that minority communities generally prefer Congressional leadership that belongs to the same ethnic minority.

Although an overwhelming majority of MCs in the U.S. House of Representatives is ethnically white, MCs representing districts with large minority populations are able to form relationships with their constituents based on trust principally when there is a shared ethnicity or cultural background (Gay 719). In the absence of racial identification with one's MC, levels of mutual trust are relatively lower, yet "expectations of favorable legislative outcomes remain the same" (Gay 719). Minority constituents in general do not expect white Congressional representatives to promote ethnic- or culture-specific agendas in the House, regardless of party identification (Gay 721).³ Although minority constituents are not sufficiently innocent to believe that their Congressional representative has the power to "fundamentally alter how Congress does business, a constituent's ability to identify racially with her MC influences the attitudes and behavior that define the member-constituent relationship" (Gay 731). Therefore, it can be said that ethnicity and/or cultural background plays a vital, but not singular, role in the success of an MC in a minority community; meeting the policy needs of constituents is also fundamental (Polinard et al. 7).

³ In a study of black voters, the conclusion was reached that black Democratic constituents do not maintain high legislative hopes when they are represented in Congress by white Democrats, and white Democratic constituents "place [a] greater premium on race" and are even less optimistic when there is a black Democrat representing their Congressional interests (Gay 731).

In addition to the emotions stirred up in constituents by their Congressional representatives, MC behavior toward constituents also comes significantly to bear in any treatment of minority representation and leadership. Politicians “position themselves so that they can appeal most strongly to their own district’s interests” (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 136). To ensure future success (read: re-election), MCs are careful in presenting themselves in the public eye as having a political ideology that goes beyond being compatible with that of the district he or she represents; it is identical (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 138). A Congressional representative’s personal image is carefully crafted in order to guarantee satisfaction among the greatest possible number of constituents. This generally entails fashioning a centrist political discourse that appeals to a broad segment of the voting population, “so the [MCs] should accurately reflect the desires of the greatest number of voters” (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 152).⁴

In essence, political leadership in minority districts is most desirable when ethnic identification between MCs and their minority constituents is achieved and when the real needs and policy concerns of these constituents become the chief substance of the political strategies of MCs. Do the MCs currently serving districts with large minority communities in Los Angeles County meet these guidelines for Congressional leadership? The next section sheds light on the subject.

⁴ This political strategy causes Congressional candidates to strongly resemble each other ideologically: “The center is the segment of the electorate to which candidates are most responsive, and if candidates know the preferences of voters they will converge exactly to the median voter” (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 153).

Congressional Profiles: Democrats Rule

As outlined in the section titled “Research Methodology” in the Introduction of this work, the initial research for this project was conducted online. By determining which Congressional districts contained a portion of or were wholly encompassed by the County of Los Angeles, I was able to come up with 19 Congressional districts that fit within the confines of this endeavor and 19 Members of Congress who were potential subjects for my research. Sixteen of these Representatives allowed me to drop off questionnaires for them at their offices on Capitol Hill or send them a questionnaire via mail (a list of these MCs is located within Appendix Three), and two of these MCs ultimately responded. However, before moving on to these responses, there are some general characteristics of all 16 MCs who received questionnaires that I would like to discuss.

By logging on to the U.S. House of Representatives official website and subsequently to the websites of each individual MC, I gathered some basic, yet interesting, data that begins to give a glimpse at a profile of the average MC in L.A. County currently in office. Out of the 16 Representatives that received my questionnaire, about 38% of them are women; almost 70% of them are Democrats; nearly 69% of them possess an academic degree beyond a Bachelor’s degree (Master’s, Ph.D., or Juris Doctorate) (three out of the 16 Representatives listed no college or higher education whatsoever); and more than 60% of them are white ethnics, 25% of them are Latino, and nearly 13% of them are black.⁵ Issues cited by many of these MCs as being among the timeliest and most vital on their political agendas include the war in Iraq, education,

⁵ If we consider data taken from the U.S. Census Bureau website, we see that whites make up 31.1% of L.A. County residents, Latinos comprise 44.6%, and blacks represent 9.8% according to data from the year 2000. Therefore, it is plain that the cultural breakdown of MCs is not representative of that county’s demographics. Asian Americans – who make up 11.9% of L.A. County’s population – should be disappointed in light of their complete lack of Congressional representation.

Social Security reform, job creation and the economy, as well as issues pertaining to senior citizens and veterans. As we saw at the end of Chapter Three, these are also among the political concerns that were ranked highest by the Mexican Americans who completed questionnaires for this project.

Certain characteristics of the Congressional districts themselves are beneficial for the purposes of this project. Of the 16 districts considered in this study, four of them are home to populations comprised of between 20-30% Latinos; three districts are between 30-40% Latino; one district is between 40-50% Latino; and five districts contain a population of more than 50% Latinos. In all the districts boasting a Latino population of 30% or more, all Congressional representatives are Democrats and six of them are non-white ethnics (black or Latino). The four Congressional districts with the highest percentages of Latinos – the 31st, 34th, 38th, and 39th districts – are the same districts where the MCs possess the ability to racially or culturally identify with their constituents; that is, in districts comprised of more than 60% Latino residents, the MCs are, without exception, Latinos. The two black female MCs in Los Angeles County both represent districts where Latinos make up more than 30% of the population. Therefore, the higher the percentage of Latinos in an L.A. County Congressional district, the higher the possibility of the election of a minority MC. Minority representation in Congress – at least in Southern California – is indeed catching up with the multicultural demographics in that region.

Drawing from this data, one might say that minority politicians affiliated with the Democratic Party may be what the Mexican-American community has traditionally sought out for Congressional leadership. But let us not get ahead of ourselves here; the

next section goes into more detail about what Members of Congress have to offer the minority communities of L.A. County.

Word on the Hill: Searching for Answers in Washington, D.C.

The final leg of this investigation took place in the U.S. Capitol, as I attempted to personally contact all the Members of Congress who represent districts in L.A. County comprised of noteworthy quantities of Mexican Americans.⁶ Utilizing data published by the U.S. Census Bureau on the Internet, I was able to distinguish which Representatives would be helpful in this project. After contacting the offices of these Representatives by telephone and in person several times, I achieved the completion of one questionnaire by staffers in the office of the Honorable Xavier Becerra and I was granted interview time with a Senior Legislative Aide in the office of another Member of Congress (on the condition that I not publish his name or the name of his employer). In this section, I reveal the four questions that I asked these high-level individuals and their responses, in an effort to draw conclusions about the perspectives of MCs toward their constituents. Before moving on, however, I would like to take a moment to highlight Congressman Becerra, his personal background, and how he serves as an edifying symbol in any discussion of minority Congressional leadership.

Using the same criteria as that of the previous section to determine various personal characteristics of the MCs employed in this study, I learned a few things about Congressman Becerra that are potentially enlightening. A California-born-and-raised son of Mexican immigrants, he was the first in his family to graduate from college. He earned

⁶ All but two L.A. County Congressional districts of the 16 districts treated in this project – the 30th and the 46th – are comprised of at least 20% Latinos, and these residents are primarily Mexican Americans according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2000 data.

a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Stanford and then completed a Juris Doctorate from the Law School at the same institution in 1984. After an illustrious career in the legal field, Congressman Becerra is now a married father of three in addition to being an elected representative of his community.

The Congressman's website lauds Becerra as having "dedicated himself to promoting issues affecting industries critical to the Southern California region such as entertainment, high technology, health care, and stimulating free, yet fair, trade." Some of the key issues listed there include increasing "opportunities for working families, [improving] the Social Security program for women and minorities, [combating] poverty among the working poor through our welfare laws, and [strengthening] Medicare and [ensuring] its long-term viability."

The Congressional district Becerra represents – the 31st – is located entirely within the City of Los Angeles and includes all or parts of the neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Eagle Rock, Echo Park, Glassell Park, Highland Park, Hollywood, Jefferson Park, Koreatown, Lincoln Heights, Mid City, Montecito Heights, Monterey Hills, Mount Washington, New Chinatown, Pico Union, Silverlake, South Los Angeles, Vernon, and Westlake. Judging from the names of some of these neighborhoods, one can see the implicit multiculturalism of the constituents represented by Becerra; Census data reveals that 70.2% of the residents in the 31st district are Latinos (mostly Mexican Americans), 34.2% are white, 14% are Asian American, 4.7% are black, and 46% claim "two or more races" or "some other race."

Overall, Xavier Becerra embodies many of the key qualities in a Congressional representative of a community comprised of residents belonging to any number of various minority groups. He is the first generation of his Mexican-American family

raised in the United States, as well as the first to obtain a degree of higher education. Therefore, since he is a product of the U.S. educational system and he possesses a familial closeness with Mexican culture, he is doubly attractive to the Mexican-American community as an elected official. His allegiance to the Democratic Party and shared policy concerns and political agendas with the Mexican Americans who reside within his district are additional incentives for the rallying of the Chicano vote. His resemblance to the ideal MC that I am about to present to the reader of this project is uncanny.

At this point, the qualities of the ideal MC for Mexican-American communities seem to me to be quite clear, and perhaps the reader has already inferred what they in fact are from my research and analysis up until now. Hence a grand unveiling may be superfluous. However, before moving on to the climax of this undertaking, I would like to briefly discuss the results of my previously mentioned trip to Washington, D.C., where I came into contact with Becerra and one other MC in my quest to determine the in/accessibility of Congressional representatives.

By the end of the week I had spent in my nation's Capitol doing the "pavement pounding" for this project, I had obtained no tangible evidence that would serve me in this project. That is, no MC had filled out one of my questionnaires and returned it to me as I had proposed. I had received assurances from several staffers in several different MC offices that they would mail the completed document to me at my California address, but I had little faith that anyone would fulfill these seemingly empty promises. However, during a trip to California in September, I was very pleased to see among the piles of correspondence for me that someone in the office of the Honorable Xavier Becerra had taken pity on my academic soul and had returned to me a completed questionnaire several weeks following my sojourn in Washington, and the contents follow here.

The first item on the questionnaire was a request for the MC's opinions on a series of statements about the political inactivity of Mexican Americans in Southern California. The response from the office of Congressman Becerra (herein referred to as Becerra) effectively shot down residential dispersion as a potential explanation for low Chicano voter registration and turnout; Becerra insisted that Mexican Americans are geographically concentrated within Southern California, citing the same U.S. Census Bureau data that I used earlier in this section. He continued by attributing Chicano political abstention to the overall youth of Latinos in general,⁷ as well as to their high poverty indices; he argued that individuals who "lack resources may be unable to take a day off to vote, have a car to drive to the polling place, or have information available about elections."⁸

The second item dealt with the status of Mexican Americans as a community with special needs, and Becerra seemed to skirt the issue by calling upon the diversity within the Chicano population in his district and invoking the socially healing powers of an empowering education. "All people, in fact, benefit from an education,"⁹ Becerra stated, but "what makes the Latino case special is the lack of opportunity [they have] to receive the same education as more affluent neighbors." According to Becerra, educational

⁷ In conjunction with the increasing growth of young California Latinos, the state is experiencing a "graying" of its white population. "Californians of color not only are becoming the numerical majority, but they are heavily concentrated in the younger age categories," while the white population as a whole is aging steadily (Hu-DeHart 6).

⁸ These excuses did not seem persuasive to me: California law requires employers to allow workers two hours off to vote; polling places are not usually far from constituents' homes (I walked to vote in both the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000); and ballots – in English and Spanish – are mailed to voters a week or so before elections.

⁹ The correlation between educational levels attained and propensity to vote is a widely promoted concept among scholars. The authors Brischetto and De la Garza devote an entire section of their report to this relationship (13-18). Elster does not lag: Given that large numbers of U.S. Latinos fall below the poverty line (see Chapter One), an assertion that poverty reduces political motivation – an essential by-product of education – is useful to me in this endeavor (17). Brady, Verba, and Schlozman are in agreement: "Education [...] is important for some political activities because it enhances political interest and civic skills" (271). And the author Montoya brings it home: "The most consistent predictors of voting and other forms of political participation across time and different populations are income, education, and age" (32).

opportunities can be opened up to the Latino community through the increased availability of information about special programs, financial aid, and scholarships. Because many Latinos are the first in their families to aspire to higher education, as was Becerra, they often do not know where to look for guidance in the application process. “Information meets the needs of everyone and ensures that people are aware of their opportunities,” noted the Congressman.

The next item on the questionnaire was a petition for a description of the average constituent in the Congressional district represented by the MC at hand, as well as of the kind of qualities they look for in an MC. Becerra described the average constituent in the 31st district as low or middle working class with a median annual family income around \$26,000, and speaking a language other than English at home, since 80% of his constituents fall under this distinction. With regards to qualities sought by this average constituent in his or her MC, Becerra asserts that he or she “desires a Congressional Representative that is sensitive to their needs and is willing to work for an economy that provides stability for families.”

The final question was a more complex one, so quoting the full text here is simpler than attempting to paraphrase. The question was as follows:

It is a widely accepted truth that the Mexican-American population in L.A. County is a highly diverse one, comprised of newly arrived immigrants, blue collar and white collar members of the labor force, low- and middle-class families, college students, entrepreneurs, etc. In your opinion, does this diversity hinder the political development of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles County? Or does this diversity provide opportunities for

politically marginalized individuals to seek empowerment through ‘niche politics’?

Becerra was quick to champion the “empowering” virtue of the “diversity among Latinos” in Southern California that “allows for a [variety] of views,” but also recognized the difficulty it causes in allowing a minority community to make quick policy decisions. Along these lines, Becerra asserted that “the fact that Latinos are spreading across socioeconomic groups allows the Latino community to pursue more [political] representation.”¹⁰ The Congressman implied that he prefers to deal with Mexican Americans as a Latino subgroup, as “it is very difficult to separate the concerns of Mexican Americans from the considerable Central and South American immigrant populations [...] The bond created by society benefits Latinos because it gives them a large resource base. Most Latinos of different nationalities in the 31st district agree with each other on social issues and immigration.”¹¹

The second respondent to my inquiries in Washington, D.C., was a Senior Legislative Aide in the office of an MC who preferred to respond anonymously. I was generously granted off-the-record interview time by this Aide, who spoke frankly about the issues raised in my investigation. He began the interview by bucking the “key assumption” that “most Mexican Americans in L.A. County live east of downtown” and cited the latest Census Bureau information in his defense. He pointed out that many

¹⁰ There seems to be at least one Chicano political/community organization for each socioeconomic bracket of the Mexican-American population in California: LULAC and its promotion of the politics of “accommodation” tends to cater to the upper classes (Ortiz speaks of this at length throughout his essay on the political strategies of Chicano/as); as a university-based organization, MEChA seems to address the cultural and political needs of middle- and upper-class youth (see Chapter Three); and the lower classes of Chicanos living in the United States can look to grass-roots groups like the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO) for social and political support in community enterprises (Brackman and Erie 207).

¹¹ “National identities can be suppressed only through the imposition of a more encompassing identity or a new national identity” (Torres 155). Suppression of “Mexicanness” and acceptance into the broader “Latino” community allows Chicanos more direct access to the political arena and offers politicians representing these communities a larger, albeit more abstract, constituency which with he or she can interact.

Mexican Americans live in the western region of Los Angeles, falling in the Congressional district represented by his employer, justifying their office's sincere concern for the Chicano community.

Noting that his black female employer is “obviously not Latina,”¹² the Legislative Aide said that his employer does not issue any “specific pitch” to Mexican Americans in particular.¹³ However, as an African American woman, she “understands the challenges of the disenfranchised” and focuses on “issues that cut across ethnic distinctions.” Issues of paramount interest to her constituents included the availability of low income housing, the creation of jobs, transportation concerns, Homeland Security benefits, economic development, health, and immigration (“not just a Latino issue”) – all topics that met the Aide's qualification of cutting across “ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries.” As a member of the diverse African-American community in L.A. County, the MC in question also understands the diversity that exists within the Mexican-American community. When she holds an event, said the Aide, it is to support or promote a specific issue and is not directed at any particular ethnic or cultural community. For example, a housing event thrown by his employer is simultaneously a black, Latino, and Asian event.

During the course of the interview, the Legislative Aide mentioned a confrontational facet to the relationship between distinct minority groups. According to him, there is a strong tendency of the African-American community to view the potential mobilization of Mexican-American political power as an “us-them” scenario. The Aide

¹² Latinos, according to the U.S. Census Bureau website, can be of any race, so the Legislative Assistant I interviewed could quite possibly be employed by an MC that is both black and Latina. De la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia elaborate: “According to established American racial categories, Mexican-Americans are racially mixed. They are primarily composed of whites, Indians, and mestizos (white-Indian combinations), which is why the United States Census notes they (referring to all Hispanics) may be of any race” (341).

¹³ The tendency of many Congressional strategists to mold policy around a pan-ethnic identity – such as the Latino identity – echoes the propensity of “political parties and other organizations [to] coalesce more readily around ethnic than around other identities” (Fish and Brooks 154).

assured that his employer's message to black and Latino constituents is that pitting themselves against each other does not serve either community in a positive way.

In response to the third item on my questionnaire, the Aide exhorted that it is "impossible" to describe the average constituent in the district represented by his employer. Despite the perceived outlandishness of the endeavor, the Aide gave it a try. He said that an average constituent in the district at hand would have to be a person with one white, one black, one Latino, and one Asian grandparent, and it would have to be someone who has lived in every socioeconomic bracket; that is how culturally and economically diverse this district is. The Aide noted that working in such a varied district is "interesting," but that it is also a "challenge" when having to decide whether to be "ethnically neutral" on issues or to "address particular groups." After a thoughtful pause, he said, "I think you can do both" on certain issues, and that is his employer's approach. "We're trying to help everyone!"

Qualities of the Ideal Congressional Representative for Chicano Communities

Now I would like to put all the information that I have collected throughout the duration of this project to service in order to reflect and speculate on the expressed and implied political needs of Mexican Americans as a community in Southern California. In view of their long and influential history in the region that is now California, respecting the social and cultural diversity of Chicanos is crucial in the formulation of an "ideal" Congressional leader for their various communities. Based on the data gathered in the questionnaires completed by Mexican Americans, on my personal experiences in Washington, D.C., as well as on the synthesis of the massive literature I have pored over in this enterprise, I now present the qualities that a Member of Congress representing a

Mexican-American community should possess in order to be considered “ideal” according to the criteria corresponding to this project.

Education, Profession, & Party Affiliation: The ideal MC for the Mexican-American communities of Southern California is an educated individual, having completed at least a Bachelor’s degree from a university boasting of at least moderate prestige; a California institution is preferable, perhaps Stanford or Berkeley (see Appendix Five for a list of MC alma maters). A legal career advocating the rights of the disenfranchised seems to be the professional path most likely to lead to a Congressional seat, and affiliation with the Democratic Party is most likely to ensure ideological cohesion with the primarily lower- and middle-class constituents that make up most Chicano communities.

Policy Concerns: Recalling the items listed by the Mexican Americans who filled out questionnaires for this project (as illustrated in Chapter Three), the policy concerns most coveted by Chicano communities and therefore most critical to the political success of MCs representing them include the following: issues relating to healthcare and health insurance, education, the “economy” (creation of jobs), availability of low-income housing, immigration, Social Security and welfare reform, and issues affecting senior citizens and veterans of war. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it serves to provide entrée into the necessary political agenda of the ideal MC for Mexican-American communities.¹⁴

Cultural Identification/Awareness: Among the responses garnered from the Mexican Americans solicited for assistance with this project, only one person placed any emphasis at all on the importance of cultural identification with one’s Congressional

¹⁴ “Latino voters are mobilized to vote in local and state elections when candidates who speak to issues of concern to them run for office” (Montoya 34).

representative, manifested by proficiency in the Spanish language (see page 77 of the present volume). However, drawing from the research already considered at the beginning of the present chapter, an MC's ability to ethnically or culturally identify with his or her constituents is valuable political currency for both Congressional incumbents and challengers alike. Therefore, the ideal MC for a Chicano community should either be Latino/a (preferably Mexican American, since they make up a majority of Latinos in California) (De la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia 347), or should be well read on themes relating to the cultural and political formation of Latino communities; this absolutely includes an advanced working knowledge of the Spanish language. Also, the ideal MC will better relate to his or her constituency if his or her cultural ties to Mexican roots are not overly extended; that is, individuals from their families' first or second generation in the United States might be better equipped to form honest and meaningful relationships with constituents and promote their community's specific political needs in Congress.

Accessibility: Another important instrument in the fomentation of strong MC-constituent relationships in Chicano communities is accessibility. If an individual feels that they have personal access to and influence over the time and policy agenda of his or her Congressional representative, they are more likely to demonstrate confidence in the U.S. political system and exercise their voting power. Since MCs must answer to thousands of constituents, this kind of personalized relationship is difficult to maintain with each individual voter. "Casework" makes the dream of forming a personal connection with each constituent closer to becoming reality.¹⁵

¹⁵ "The fresh angle, which has mushroomed since the mid-1970s, is doing a huge volume of little personal favors for constituents. In Congress, they call it 'casework.' That means having your staff track down missing Social Security checks, inquire about sons and husbands in the armed services, help veterans get medical care, pursue applications for small-business loans. With this technique, some senators and House members become more valued by thousands of voters as ombudsmen than as legislators" (Smith 124).

That Personal Touch: Not only Mexican Americans, but the general U.S. population as well, have declined in their levels of political activity over the past decade or so, and some authors attribute this to a significant decrease in the amount of face-to-face contact between voters and campaign personnel (including candidates). The impersonal nature of political contact – or, the “changing character of American campaigns” – in recent years seems to have contributed to progressively lower voter turnout (Gerber and Green 655). It is somewhat safe to assume that increased quantities of personal interaction between lay individuals and political actors may increase voter turnout in all urban communities, not just in Chicano ones.

The Real Thing: Congressional Leadership in the Here and Now

Earlier in this chapter, I provided information on the MCs and Congressional districts of Los Angeles County, and I have just listed the qualities possessed by the ideal MC for the Mexican-American communities of Southern California. The moment is now appropriate to compare the illusion with the reality and determine how close, indeed, they resemble each other.

Considering that I chose the traits that the ideal MC representing Chicano communities must possess based upon documentary research, small polling samples of Mexican Americans, and upon the current reality of the various Congressional districts of L.A. County, the ideal MC from this region does not so much resemble a figment of one’s imagination but rather a nebulous version of the truth. Educated in institutions of higher education, distinguished careers in the legal profession, and affiliation with the Democratic Party characterize more than half of the MCs considered in this project (see Appendix Five). The broad array of policy concerns listed on the MC websites is

certainly vast enough to encompass the chief political issues mentioned by the Chicano constituents consulted for this project. Only four MCs from the Congressional districts relevant to this study are Latinos, occasioning a notable cultural disparity between the ideal MC described in the previous section and the overwhelmingly white leadership that currently represents ten out of the 16 Congressional districts under examination. As I demonstrated with my field work earlier in this chapter, accessibility is a weakness of MCs that is slowly being remedied by the burgeoning popularity of Congressional casework.¹⁶ And finally, contemporary Representatives do not seem to be responding to academic research dealing with the impersonality of modern political campaigns; employing people to physically knock on doors and spread the messages of the politicians throughout their Congressional districts is expensive, and recruiting volunteers to do so is time- and labor-intensive.

I have asserted that the ideal MC constructed in this project is not an unlikely possibility. So now I must ask the question: is there an MC currently serving in Congress that embodies all the characteristics of my ideal MC? The answer is yes, and in fact, there are three MCs serving in the 108th Congress that possess nearly all the qualities I have laid down for the ideal MC in Chicano communities. Xavier Becerra (as already discussed in detail), Lucille Roybal-Allard of the 34th district, and Linda Sanchez of the 39th district are all university-educated Latinos whose basic profiles meet the requirements of ideal Congressional leadership for the Mexican-American communities of Southern California. Perhaps the Representatives in this project are not as “out of touch” as I presumed them to be at the outset of this venture. If there is a political crossroads between MCs and their Mexican-American constituents, it appears to be the

¹⁶ However, even a dramatic increase in the amount of casework for individual constituents would not have helped me in this scholarly enterprise as I no longer reside in the zip codes that correspond to L.A. County.

Chicanos – who do not register or go to the polls to vote for their leadership or policy choices – who are farther off the proverbial mark and should change their ways in order to achieve political empowerment.