

(Washington DC) This morning the Supreme Court of the United States handed down its decision in the Texas redistricting decision and found that the 2003 map violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA.) The Court held that moving 100,000 Latino voters out of District 23, represented by Republican Henry Bonilla, was illegal because the maneuver represented a dilution of minority voting strength. However, the Supreme Court rejected the larger challenge to the mid-cycle redistricting of Texas congressional districts and held this practice as constitutional.

Congressman Charlie Gonzalez, one of the appellants in this case, issued the following statement:

"This is a clear victory for the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and the rights of all voters. The redrawing of the boundaries of the 23rd Congressional District at the expense of the rights of minority voters was a practice that President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Congress sought to stop in 1965 when they drafted and enacted the original VRA. Maps designed to negate or dilute the voting strength of minorities, in this case Latinos, are illegal. This decision loudly reaffirms this core principle of the VRA.

The Supreme Court has recognized the continuing need to protect minority voting rights and that they are cognizant of the practices used to deny this most fundamental right. Minority voters in Texas and elsewhere still need vigorous enforcement of a strong VRA.

The Court's opinion explicitly denounced the intent to disenfranchise Latino voters in District 23 through splitting the city of Laredo into two districts with the intent to gain an extreme partisan advantage.

It is my hope that the new map that will respect and protect Latino voting rights.

Yet, I am troubled that today's opinion signals that the Court will allow a state to redistrict anytime it likes. I think this will ultimately undermine the stability of the political process because it introduces an element of unpredictability."

####