

LYM Will Intervene In Texas Run-Off Race

by Patricia Salisbury

Dec. 12 is the date set for the run-off election between pro-Bush Congressman Henry Bonilla (R) and former Democratic Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, for the 23rd Congressional District in Texas. The LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM) in Texas will continue the mass organizing which played a key role in the Democratic Party victory in the midterm elections nationally, as former Congressman Rodriguez vies to unseat seven-term incumbent Bonilla, and deliver another seat to the Democratic Party majority in the House of Representatives.

Rodriguez was redistricted out of office in 2004, as part of disgraced former Speaker of the House Tom DeLay's (R-Tex.) redistricting shenanigans. While the District Court upheld most of DeLay's redistricting, it did insist on redrawing the 23rd CD. Because the map was redrawn after the primary, the Nov. 7 vote was an "open" election, in which four Democrats ran against Bonilla. As Bonilla received less than 50% of the vote, he was forced into a run-off against Rodriguez, who received the most votes among the Democrats. In the seven-person race, Bonilla drew 49%, while Rodriguez took 20%.

Bonilla is a hard-core Bush Leaguer, one of the poster boys for Karl Rove's efforts to make gains for the GOP among Hispanic voters. The district, which was custom-designed for him by DeLay, included a big chunk of the heavily Republican suburbs of San Antonio. The court-ordered redistricting, which determined the current shape of the district, makes it competitive. In the first round, neither the Democratic National Committee nor the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee provided backing for Rodriguez. However, since Bonilla was denied the seat on Nov. 7, both the DNC and the DCCC have sent operatives into the district, with the dubious aim making the campaign "more professional."

However, it is the deployment by LYM organizers which will be the key factor, as the 18-25-year-old youth population is energized, with spillover into the 25-35-year-old age group, as was seen with such dramatic results in the national midterm election. LYM organizers plan a two-week blitz of the district, and will concentrate their efforts on campuses in the most heavily populated areas near San Antonio. A new LaRouche PAC pamphlet, "Organizing the Recovery from the Great Crash of 2007," will be mass distributed, and Bonilla's role as a rubber stamp for the Cheney-Bush Administration on the

Iraq War, Social Security privatization, and tax cuts will be thoroughly exposed.

U.S.-Mexican Border Infrastructure

In a recent discussion with LYM members at a campaign event, Rodriguez said he intends to make U.S.-Mexican border development and infrastructure his major issues. The newly drawn district runs for miles along the Mexican border, with parts of 12 counties bordering the Rio Grande. The region is in the driest parts of Southwest Texas, which face perennial drought conditions, and occasional flash floods. Cross-border water management and sanitation infrastructure are desperately needed. Rodriguez said that water is a major concern for him, and expressed interest in LaRouche's Emergency Reconstruction Act.

Rodriguez has also made a major point of the fact that the district is an area of greater-than-usual health problems and lack of health insurance. In fact, at a conference convened on June 22 by the Texas Medical Association, the Border Health Caucus, and Rep. Silvestre Reyes (D-Tex.), the medical and health issues of the border area, which includes portions of the 23rd CD, were characterized as so extreme, that they approximate those of Third World countries.

Data amassed by the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission and presented at the conference showed that if the 24 U.S. counties along the border were made the 51st state, that state would be: 2nd in the incidence of tuberculosis; third in deaths due to hepatitis; 5th in diabetes-related deaths; 50th in insurance coverage for adults and children; and 51st in the number of health-care professionals. These are the conditions of extreme poverty that characterize portions of the Texas 23rd CD.

Veterans and the Iraq War

At a press conference on Nov. 21, Rodriguez addressed the Iraq War issue, blasting Bonilla as a hypocrite, for arguing in favor of the Bush policy, and promoting himself as a friend of the military, while he has cast several votes against benefits for soldiers, and against Democratic efforts to improve the health-care and insurance program for reservists and National Guard members, as well as increased funding for the Veterans Administration hospitals and out-patient programs. The lack of veterans' health services in the areas of the district south of San Antonio was a major issue in the Texas race for U.S. Senate.

Rodriguez, along with Latino groups, is also raising the issue of ongoing Republican dirty tricks in the district. Rodriguez had claimed that the short time-frame of the election, with the run-off date set for Dec. 12 by Republican Gov. Rick Perry, a date which was announced only on Nov. 22, is a Republican scheme to disenfranchise voters. The League of United Latin American Citizens says the date is a Republican attempt to "suppress" Hispanic votes by allowing too little time to mobilize.