

# Big field, big money highlight Fresno City Council District 1 race

BY GEORGE HOSTETTER

<http://www.modbee.com/2014/04/20/3301776/big-field-big-money-highlight.html>

The Fresno Bee

April 20, 2014

An open seat on the Fresno City Council has drawn a diverse field of seven candidates seeking to represent an equally diverse District 1 on the council.

Incumbent Council Member Blong Xiong will be termed out in January after eight years in office.

District 1 ranges from the historic Tower and Fresno High School neighborhoods to the fast-growing housing projects west of Highway 99.

The seven candidates bring with them a variety of experiences.

Lawrence Cano finished a distant second to Xiong in the two-candidate 2010 District 1 race.

Mark Castro is a lawyer who runs his own trucking business.

Cary Catalano is a businessman and long-time community volunteer who has the support of Mayor Ashley Swearengin.

Rama Dawar is a businessman who has the backing of Xiong.

Rebeca Rangel is a mental-health advocate with long experience in City Hall issues.

Jackson Shepherd is an army veteran who served a year in Afghanistan.

Esmeralda Soria is a lawyer and policy adviser who has Assembly Member Henry T. Perea and Fresno County Supervisor Henry R. Perea in her camp.

Public safety, jobs and infrastructure (things like street maintenance and tree-trimming) are priorities for all.

What's unclear at this point is whether the race will affect dynamics at City Hall. Counting noses is the name of the game in this era of co-equal branches -- council and mayor. With seven candidates, a run-off in the November general election is likely.

Xiong and Swearengin have had their share of conflicts. The Pereas and Swearengin barely tolerate each other.

Take a look at those endorsements for Catalano, Dawar and Soria. Personalities and money, not policy nuances, figure to drive this campaign leading up to the June 3 primary.

According to City Hall records, Dawar has raised about \$80,000, Catalano more than \$70,000 and Soria more than \$60,000.

Businesses have been key contributors to Dawar.

Catalano's donors include developers and Friends of Ashley Swearengin, the mayor's campaign committee.

Soria's financial supporters include the city's firefighters union and Friends of Henry R. Perea, the supervisor's campaign committee.

Here's a look at each candidate:

### **Lawrence Cano**

Cano referred The Bee to his campaign web site for his top issues. He received 31.3% of the vote in the 2010 District 1 race.

"My goal is to bring jobs to our city," Cano said on the site. "The other is to get residents more involved in their neighborhoods and schools."

He said he would work closely with law enforcement "to reduce crime that has become a huge burden in our city and our district."

Cano said he is concerned with big rigs parking in residential neighborhoods, making it hard for motorists to get by. He wants better sidewalks and suggests speed bumps to create safer neighborhoods, especially those with many children.

### **Mark Castro**

Castro said he worries when he looks at the police and fire departments. The former is down about 150 sworn officers from several years ago. The latter also is understaffed and struggles with equipment shortages.

"We must find creative ways to improve those services," Castro said.

The city should consider reopening the police station on Broadway, south of Olive Avenue, Castro said. He said the improved security would be felt further north, where District 1 begins.

Castro said he favors more input from residents. He recommends more citizen-advisory groups.

Castro said he supports infill development and the preservation of farmland. As to taxes, Castro said, "I defer to the wishes of the voters."

### **Cary Catalano**

Catalano's resume includes past service on the boards of the Fresno Housing Authority and Girl Scouts of Central California South.

Running for the District 1 seat "is a natural progression in my level of community service," Catalano said.

Catalano described himself as "a natural collaborator" who will bring a different perspective to the dais. For example, he said City Hall dropped the ball when it came to planning for the explosive growth west of Highway 99.

"Residents west of 99 don't feel like they are part of the greater Fresno area," Catalano said. "My job over the next eight years is to let them know they matter to Fresno and the rest of the region."

Catalano said his top two issues are public safety and economic growth. He said voters know the city coffers are far from full. Still, he said, money can be found to improve public safety.

"We need to do it all without raising taxes," Catalano said.

### **Rama Dawar**

Dawar is a former Fresno Planning Commission member and local Realtor who said he will push hard for a strong economy.

Dawar said the formula is proven: More jobs mean more economic activity. More economic activity means more tax revenue. More revenue means improved public safety, better care for infrastructure, additional green space and improved quality of life, he said.

"The city of Fresno must pursue greater economic development to ensure residents have access to high-paying jobs," Dawar said. "This expands our tax base without raising taxes."

Dawar wants to hire more police officers.

"I want to make sure citizens and businesses are safe," he said.

Dawar said City Hall must cut the red tape that hobbles business growth.

"I would make our city more business-friendly," he said.

## **Rebeca Rangel**

Rangel said there are many ways to improve public safety. For example, she said, Neighborhood Watch programs could be strengthened.

"It can't always be more police," Rangel said. "It's about more than that. It's about more activism from the people who are there in the neighborhoods."

Rangel said her 30 years of community-organizing taught her the value of collaboration. She said she would make City Hall more accessible.

"People want to be a part of what's going on," she said.

Homelessness is one of her key issues, Rangel said. She said the demise of camps on H and G streets in downtown pushed some of the homeless into District 1. She said the city needs to look at creative ways to find shelter for the homeless.

Rangel said the city must help the unemployed, even if it's something as simple as teaching someone how to complete a job application.

## **Jackson Shepherd**

Shepherd said he decided to run after taking a hard look at his neighborhood near Fruit and Shields avenues.

"I'm not happy with the direction it's going," he said.

Shepherd said he favors programs to convince youngsters to avoid gangs.

Shepherd said council members' salaries are too big. The council president makes \$70,170 annually. The other six make \$65,000 annually.

Shepherd said he wants the community to take a bigger role in its own affairs.

"In the military," he said, "the idea is to solve problems at the lowest levels."

## **Esmeralda Soria**

Soria has worked as a lawyer for the disadvantaged and a policy adviser for legislators, most recently for Assembly Member Henry T. Perea.

She said she learned much from her parents, immigrants who worked the Central Valley's fields.

"My parents taught me the value of being a hard worker, someone who is committed to the family and the community," Soria said. "Growing up in a household of seven, with no more than \$20,000 a year, I have truly seen what it is to live within your means and to be responsible fiscally."

Soria said she wants to strengthen the local economy and create more jobs. She said she's worried about property crime.

"I want to see cops on bikes again," Soria said. "That's what we used to have. It creates a sense of security."

Soria said she wants less conflict at City Hall.

"You can't afford to run a city council that way," Soria said.

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### **Fresno City Council District 1 candidates**

**NAME:** Lawrence Cano **AGE:** 50 **OCCUPATION:** Manager, Power Electric Products Co. **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, business administration, Sacramento State **FAMILY:** Single **WEB:** lawrencecano.com **FACEBOOK:** Lawrence Cano **TWITTER:** none

**NAME:** Mark Castro **AGE:** 28 **OCCUPATION:** Businessman/attorney **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, political science/history, Notre Dame de Namur University, law degree from San Joaquin College of Law **FAMILY:** Single **WEB:** castroforfresno.com **FACEBOOK:** castroforfresno **TWITTER:** @castroforfresno

**NAME:** Cary Catalano **AGE:** 40 **OCCUPATION:** Chief Executive, Catalano Fenske & Associates, a marketing, public relations and business development company **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, public administration, Fresno State **FAMILY:** No children **WEB:** [cary@caryforcouncil.com](mailto:cary@caryforcouncil.com) **FACEBOOK:** CaryforCouncil **TWITTER:** none

**NAME:** Rama Dawar **AGE:** 47 **OCCUPATION:** Business owner **EDUCATION:** Masters degrees in Hindi language and journalism earned in India; associate of science degree in paralegal studies from Ashworth University **FAMILY:** Married, four daughters **WEB:** ramadawarforcitycouncil.com **FACEBOOK:** ramadawarforfresnocitycouncil **TWITTER:** none

**NAME:** Rebeca Rangel **AGE:** 62 **OCCUPATION:** Mental health advocate **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, sociology, University of California at Santa Cruz; two master's degrees, ethnic studies and women's studies from San Jose State University **FAMILY:** One

daughter **WEB:**rebecaforfresnocitycouncil.com **FACEBOOK:** rebecaforfresnocitycouncil **TWITTER:** none

**NAME:** Jackson Shepherd **AGE:** 27 **OCCUPATION:** Student, working on master's degree **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, psychology, University of Phoenix **FAMILY:** One son **WEB:** none **FACEBOOK:** facebook.com/Jackson.shepherd **TWITTER:** none

**NAME:** Esmeralda Soria **AGE:** 31 **OCCUPATION:** Attorney; adjunct professor; policy adviser **EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree, Political Science and Chicano studies, University of California at Berkeley; Juris Doctorate, University of California at Davis. **FAMILY:** Single **WEB:**[www.esmeraldasoria.com](http://www.esmeraldasoria.com) **FACEBOOK:** Esmeralda for Fresno City Council-District 1 **TWITTER:**Esmeralda\_Soria

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