

Daniel Parra faces uphill battle against Buddy Mendes in Fresno Co. supervisor's race

By Marc Benjamin

Ernest "Buddy" Mendes Ernest "Buddy" Mendes, Fresno County supervisorial candidate, District 4 SPECIAL TO THE BEE

As District Four votes for Fresno County supervisor rolled in during June's primary, it wasn't clear whether Buddy Mendes and Daniel Parra would face off in November.

Mendes got close to -- but never hurdled -- the 50% mark that would have given him an outright victory in the primary. In the final tally, Mendes had 49.2%, missing a majority-vote threshold by 243 votes. Parra polled 21.1%.

The two candidates are campaigning again, but the challenge for Parra appears daunting. Mendes had a large fundraising advantage in June and since the beginning of August has raised nearly three times as much as Parra.

Mendes has raised nearly \$65,000 since the beginning of August, much of it coming from local agriculture. Parra has raised about \$23,500 in the same period, much of it from union-related donors.

Incumbent Supervisor Judy Case McNairy, who endorsed Mendes, is retiring after 16 years on the board. The district contains nine of Fresno County's 15 cities and stretches more than 100 miles from Coalinga to Orange Cove.

In the 1990 census, which established the district's boundaries when Case was elected, the district was almost 26% white and about 54% Hispanic. Today, the district's population is 72.7% Hispanic and slightly more than 20% white.

Democrats have a slight registration edge over Republicans, which could help Parra, but "if you're Daniel Parra you certainly have an uphill slog," said Thomas Holyoke, an associate professor in political science at Fresno State.

Making the prognosis for Parra even more difficult, Holyoke said, is the number of farmers who will vote on the water bond in November. He said turnout is expected to be low overall without a number of high-profile issues or races to attract voters.

Parra has been a Fowler City Council member for six years, preceded by four years as Fowler planning commissioner. He works as a computer systems analyst for military contractor Northrop Grumman at Lemoore Naval Air Station.

He is endorsed by Fresno County Supervisor Henry R. Perea. He also has support from 31 of 45 city council members in District Four.

Parra has represented the Valley on the Latino Water Coalition on trips to Sacramento and serves on the water task force for the California League of Cities.

Mendes, a board member with the Riverdale Joint Unified School District board, Riverdale Public Utilities District and Southwest Transportation Agency, said his multiple government agency background makes him the better candidate.

In addition to Case McNairy's endorsement, Mendes, 58, a Riverdale farmer and school board member, also has



support from supervisors Phil Larson, Andreas Borgeas and Sheriff Margaret Mims.

Water is an issue Mendes touts as an area of expertise since he farms 1,800 acres of Pima and Acala cotton, wheat, alfalfa and some pistachios across two irrigation districts.

While Mendes does not have union support in his fundraising efforts, he said the county's largest union, Service Employees International Union, represents workers in the Riverdale Unified School District where he has a reputation for fairness among employees.

"They aren't supporting me because I don't sign any pledges," Mendes said, referring to written promises that come from all sides of the political spectrum.

He, too, is concerned about the county's relationship with its work force, saying he would not give managers raises before negotiations were finished with employees, whose pay was cut. Supervisors approved large raises for several top managers in January.

Mendes said he wouldn't take a raise -- or would donate a raise to charity -- until employees had their pay restored.

Both men view economic development as a pathway to the county's success. Mendes said the county, and particularly the city of Fresno, must stop bickering so that the community can show a united front when recruiting corporations.

During his years in Fowler politics, Parra cites the Bobby Salazar's manufacturing plant and offices, packinghouse growth and both downtown revitalization and home renovation programs as local economic boosts.

Parra agrees that county labor and management relations are strained.

"It needs to be fixed," he said. "There are employees who are not happy, so how can we expect them to do the work we want them to do?"

He said he also supports employees getting their pay cuts restored incrementally.

"I wouldn't do it in one chunk," he said. "I would do it 2% or 3% per year, because at the same time you have to be fiscally responsible."

Parra said the Fowler City Council weathered the recession without laying off city workers. There were no raises for three years before the city was able to offer cost-of-living and step raises again.

"We made our money work but we also worked with employees," he said.

Fresno County Board of Supervisors District 4 candidates

Ernest "Buddy" Mendes

Age: 58

Residence: Riverdale

Occupation: Farmer

Education: Mission San Jose High School, Fremont; attended junior college for one year.

Family: Married, three children

Web: www.mendesforsupervisor.com

Daniel Parra

Age: 49

Residence: Fowler

Occupation: Computer systems analyst, Northrop Grumman at Lemoore Naval Air Station.

Education: Bachelor's degree in business administration from National University; master's degree in public administration from National University; completed an executive program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Business.

Family: Married, two children.

Web: www.electdanielparra.com

Supervisors' debate

What: Fresno County supervisor candidates forum

When: 7 p.m. today

Where: Fresno City College Old Administration Building auditorium, 1101 E. University Ave.

Who: District 1 candidates Brian Pacheco and Blong Xiong, District 4 candidates Ernest "Buddy" Mendes and Daniel Parra

Hosts: The Bee (Opinion Page Editor Bill McEwen is the moderator), Community Media Access Collaborative (CMAC) and the Fresno County Farm Bureau

Watch it live [here](#)

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