

Congress: Valadao wins second term; Tacherra holds surprising lead on Costa

By John
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Candidate David Valadao shakes hands with supporters at an after-election dinner party, Nov. 4, 2014 in Hanford, Calif. GARY KAZANJIAN — Fresno Bee Staff Photo | [Buy Photo](#)

Hanford Republican David Valadao won a second term in Congress on Tuesday night, getting a concession before 11 p.m. from his challenger, Sanger Democrat Amanda Renteria.

While that race wasn't as tight as some might've expected, Burrell dairy farmer Johnny Tacherra was making the run of his life.

Tacherra, running a grassroots campaign with on a modest budget — raising just \$307,000 — was slightly ahead of Fresno Democrat Jim Costa in the 16th Congressional District that covers all of Merced and parts of Madera and Fresno counties.

With all precincts in Madera, Merced and Fresno counties reporting, Tacherra had 50.5% of the vote to Costa's 49.5%. Nearly 70,000 votes had been counted.

Republicans in recent years have gone after Costa, but only now-state Sen. Andy Vidak had come close back in 2010. This year, almost no mainstream Republican — and no political pundit — gave Tacherra a chance. No independent groups weighed in, as they did for Vidak in 2010, and Costa raised \$1.3 million for this race.

Still, it was too early to call the Tacherra-Costa race, and a look back to 2010 could prove constructive — Costa was behind 1,823 votes on election night 2010, but ultimately beat Vidak by 3,031 votes after remaining mail and provisional ballots were counted. When the first round of totals had been entered early Wednesday, Tacherra's lead was 736 votes.

But Tacherra thinks the race is over.

"I think the people have spoken on this one," Tacherra said around midnight. "From the get-go I have felt good about this one."

And Tacherra's campaign team points out that the district Costa is in now is different than the one he narrowly won in 2010. They don't think Costa can find enough votes to close the gap.

Costa, who's been a state and federal politician for more than 30 years, didn't return calls seeking comment.

Valadao takes nearly 20-point win

Meanwhile, in the 21st District, Valadao's fast start came courtesy of his strongest parts of the district — Kings and Tulare counties. In both, he was winning more than 63% of the vote. Valadao was also comfortably ahead in Fresno County. Renteria only led in Kern County.

Valadao had 59.3% of the vote to Renteria's 40.7%, according to the Secretary of State's office.

"We feel very good about what has come in so far," Valadao said. "I am so proud of this district. It is a privilege to represent the Central Valley in Congress."

Michael Trujillo, Renteria's campaign manager, said the Election Day ballots will close the gap after Valadao jumped out to a big lead in mail ballot counts. In the end, he said, Renteria will turn in a respectable performance, besting John Hernandez's performance in 2012 against Valadao.

"What we did today is just one step close to the future," Trujillo said, but he refused to say if that meant Renteria would seek a 2016 rematch with Valadao.

The 21st Congressional District is considered competitive because of its voter registration numbers. Democrats hold a 17-percentage-point registration advantage over the rival Republicans, but have struggled to get voters to the polls. In addition, Valadao was well-funded two years ago when he steamrolled his underfunded and outmatched Democratic opponent, John Hernandez.

That was a stinging defeat for Democrats because President Barack Obama was winning at the same time by double-digit percentage points over Republican challenger Mitt Romney.

Renteria, 39, vowed that it would be different this year.

For one, she raised money — and lots of it. As of Oct. 15, it was more than \$1.5 million. She also hammered home a message to the district's Democrats — vote.

But Valadao's status as an incumbent buoyed his own fundraising, which as of Oct. 15 was more than \$1 million more than Renteria. A dairy farmer and Hanford native, Valadao, 37, hammered home his Valley roots, and pointed out that just about every dollar Renteria raised came from outside of the district. His commercials tried to paint her as an outsider.

Renteria, however, was anything but an outsider. She didn't come from within the district's boundaries, but is a Woodlake native who excelled at both basketball and softball at Stanford, earning an athletic scholarship as a walk-on to help pay for her schooling. She went on to earn her master's degree from Harvard University and eventually

became the first Latina chief of staff for a U.S. senator. During her time with Michigan Democrat Debbie Stabenow, Renteria worked on the early stages of what eventually became the nation's new farm bill.

Initially, the Washington pundits listed the race as one of the nation's more competitive — due primarily to the voter registration, but also because of Renteria's fundraising. But in early October, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee moved money from Renteria's race, as well as others, to help shore up incumbent Democrats in tight races. The prognosticators at that point said the race was a likely Valadao win.

Renteria, however, continued to fight. She got help from Vice President Joe Biden and the state Democratic Party, with a focus on getting voters to the polls.

In other races

- The 4th Congressional District was closely watched because it was a test of California's new top two primary system. Incumbent Republican Tom McClintock, 58, an unapologetic conservative, was challenged by fellow Republican Art Moore. Final returns, however, show Moore trailing with 39.9% of the vote to McClintock's 60.1%. There was no Democrat in the race.

Moore won the right to challenge McClintock by finishing second in the June primary, and he ran a low-budget campaign (less than \$250,000 raised) that appealed to Democrats and moderate Republicans. But Moore, a 36-year-old combat veteran and Army officer, doesn't look like he'll be able to unseat McClintock, an Elk Grove resident seeking his fourth term in Congress.

- Incumbent Tulare Republican Devin Nunes didn't campaign much at all, but still secured a seventh term in Congress, with 72.2% of the vote to Tulare Democrat Suzanna "Sam" Aguilera-Marrero's 27.8%. Nunes' 22nd Congressional District — centered on Tulare and Fresno counties — has 45% Republicans and only 32.2% Democrats. Nunes has never won less than 61% of the vote since first winning a seat in Congress in 2002.

- Bakersfield Republican Kevin McCarthy, whose 23rd Congressional District includes Porterville and the High Sierra of Tulare County as well as parts of Kern and Los Angeles counties, won more than three-quarters of the votes over Wasco Democrat Raul Garcia.

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