

Jim Costa keeps House seat, edging out Johnny Tacherra in another late-vote rally

By John
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Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, left, and Republican Johnny Tacherra. After being down on election night, Costa now looks assured of victory in the 16th Congressional District election.

SPECIAL TO THE BEE

For the second time in the past three elections, Fresno Democrat Jim Costa has rallied from an election night vote deficit to win re-election to Congress.

Fresno, Madera and Merced counties on Wednesday finished their vote counting in the 16th Congressional District, and the final tally has Costa ahead by 1,319 votes. The victory margin over unheralded Republican Johnny Tacherra won't change by more than a vote here or there as officials in the three counties clean up a few remaining ballots before they certify their results.

"It is an honor to be re-elected to represent California's 16th Congressional District," Costa said in a statement. "As a lifelong Valley resident, I am humbled that the people who live here have entrusted me to continue being their voice in Congress."

“As I like to say, at the end of the day, I put my trust and faith in the people of our Valley. There are many challenges facing the next Congress, all of which require a representative who is not afraid to reach across the aisle to find viable solutions on water, transportation, and schools.”

The Fresno update was the day’s most anticipated, but by the time it came at 3 p.m. Wednesday, it was already clear that Costa would be returning to Washington for his sixth term.

For Tacherra to have a chance of winning, the rural Fresno County dairyman needed an overwhelming victory margin in the remaining votes from Merced and Madera counties — which to date had been his strongest parts of the district. Both counties finished their vote counts, and Tacherra, 39, actually lost ground to Costa, 62. To have even had a chance of catching Costa, Tacherra would have had to win more than 80% of those votes.

Merced County finished its tallying late Tuesday evening, with Costa getting 690 votes to Tacherra’s 587. That added 103 votes to Costa’s lead in a county where he’d been losing to Tacherra by 10 percentage points.

On Wednesday morning, Madera County made its final update. Tacherra got 340 votes to Costa’s 247, an edge for Tacherra of 93.

Taken together, Costa gained 10 votes on Tacherra in the final Madera and Merced County vote counts, pushing his lead to 710 votes. That was late Wednesday morning, and already it was clear Costa had the race won.

When Fresno County’s count came out, Costa won 1,056 votes to Tacherra’s 447.

Costa ended up winning 63.9% of the Fresno County votes to Tacherra’s 36.1%. In Madera, Tacherra won 66% of the vote to Costa’s 34%, and in Merced, Tacherra won 55% to Costa’s 45%.

Overall, Costa won 50.7% and Tacherra 49.2%.

Tacherra did not return a phone call seeking comment, but he posted a congratulatory note to Costa on [his Facebook page](#).

The way this year’s 16th Congressional District race has gone feels like déjà vu for Costa from 2010, when he represented the 20th Congressional District.

That year, he turned an election night 1,823-vote deficit to Hanford Republican Andy Vidak into an eventual 3,031-vote victory. That margin was 51.8% for Costa and 48.2% for Vidak.

In 2012, Costa’s first year representing the newly created 16th Congressional District, he rolled to an easy victory over Fresno Republican Brian Whelan.

This year, Tacherra had a surprising 736-vote lead over Costa on election night.

It was more surprising than 2010 because that year, Republicans in mid-September realized Vidak had a chance to beat Costa, and by mid-October independent groups were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to tout Vidak or attack Costa. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in turn spent big in support of Costa.

Tacherra got no such help from the National Republican Congressional Committee or any independent groups. None of the polling showed Tacherra had a chance, but most of the polling assumed a much higher voter turnout.

A few days after the election, a Madera County update pushed Tacherra’s lead to 1,775, and some Republicans started celebrating what they thought was a huge upset win for Tacherra, who headed off to Washington for freshman lawmaker orientation. Some conservative commentators hailed Tacherra. Firebrand Republican Assembly Member Tim Donnelly gave Tacherra a win in public comments.

But as each new vote count showed Tacherra’s lead fading, Republican optimism gave way to a bit of post-election

remorse: if only they'd put a little money into the Costa-Tacherra campaign.

In other races

- Esmeralda Soria, who issued a victory statement Monday, increased her lead over Cary Catalano to 516 votes in the Fresno City Council District 1 race. Soria had a 422-vote lead on Friday.
- Lisa Gamoian has cinched victory in the race to be a Fresno County judge. Wednesday, her lead over Rachel Hill stood at 5,303 votes with about 1,800 provisionals left to count countywide.

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