

Senate, Assembly GOP leaders both hail from San Joaquin Valley

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The Fresno Bee February 24, 2015

Sen. Jean Fuller, R-Bakersfield

For the first time since early 2009, San Joaquin Valley elected officials are in line to hold the top Republican leadership posts in the state Legislature.

Last summer, the Assembly GOP caucus chose Kristin Olsen of Modesto as its new leader. Olsen replaced Tulare Republican Connie Conway, who was termed out of the Legislature last year.

On Tuesday, state Senate Republicans unanimously elected Jean Fuller of Bakersfield as their next leader. For the time being, Fuller will be leader-elect. She will work with current Republican Leader Bob Huff of Diamond Bar until November 1, when she will assume the post and become the Senate GOP's first woman leader.

The ascension shows the continued strength of Republicans in this part of the state.

In 2008, Senate Republicans elected Modesto's Dave Cogdill as their new leader. At that time, the Assembly's GOP leadership had already been in the hands of Clovis' Mike Villines for more than a year.

Villines and Cogdill held their respective leadership posts until the following year, when both were ousted by their caucuses for agreeing to higher taxes. Cogdill lost his post in February 2009 and Villines followed suit in May of the same year.

But Valley Republican power isn't a 21st Century development.

In the early 1990s, for example, elected GOP legislators from Fresno for a time held both leadership posts — Ken Maddy in the state Senate and Bill Jones in the state Assembly.

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