

Perea has options after Assembly career ends

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Just where, exactly, is Assembly Member Henry T. Perea headed?

This isn't a short-term musing. It's pondering the big picture for the Fresno Democrat, who is termed out of the Assembly at the end of next year.

Perea isn't talking, but there are, politically speaking, multiple potential options for him.

One of those is Congress, though it might be more accurately described as two options.

Last week, the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call ran a story about labor union unhappiness with Democrats who supported a trade package pushed by Republican congressional leaders and President Barack Obama. Unions seem to have aimed their wrath at Rep. Jim Costa, a Fresno Democrat who was one of 28 Democrats to vote for Trade Promotion Authority. Union leaders told Roll Call that Costa's vote was against American jobs.

The story went on to say that unions are looking for a fellow Democrat to challenge Costa, and had singled out Perea.

This could be true, but it also might not be the first group to query Perea about challenging Costa. There is word that some frustrated farmers and ranchers had approached Perea with a similar request earlier this year. Perea is currently the Assembly Agriculture Committee chair.

But Perea also has a second congressional option that might even be more tempting, should the U.S. Supreme Court cooperate.

A decision will come any day — and definitely before the end of the month — from the nation's highest court on a challenge to Arizona's independent redistricting commission. If the justices strike down Arizona's commission, political experts predict there would be an immediate legal effort by Democrats who control the state Legislature to undo California's own independent redistricting commission. Whether they could succeed in changing the lines before next year's elections is unknown.

Still, there has been broad speculation that the seat of Hanford Republican David Valadao could be redrawn, giving it more Democrats than it already has (a 16-percentage point advantage over the Republican Party) and moving Valadao into the seat of neighboring congressional Republican Devin Nunes. If those additional Democrats come from Fresno County, that could be a possible option for Perea.

Another possibility would be for Perea to stay in California, though the temptation of Congress might be too much to resist because the Central Valley has never had an elected Latino representative in Washington D.C.

Perea still appears to be covering all the bases. In March, he opened a campaign account for a 2018 state Insurance Commissioner run.

The odds are that this is simply a place for Perea to put his Assembly money. He has nearly \$1 million in that war chest, and opening an account for a future race is a good place to stash the cash while he considers what to do. There is no requirement to run for a seat, even if a campaign fundraising account is formed.

That said, Perea is likely to keep raising money, and if he could raise, say, \$500,000 both this year and next year, he'd have \$2 million in the campaign bank for that Insurance Commissioner run. (The money could be used for a state

office run, but not for a congressional campaign.)

It's an option.

Finally, there's the private sector.

The only thing that's clear at this point is that Perea appears to have choices. None would be easy, except maybe the private sector.

Running against Costa — an incumbent from the same party — would likely split Democrats and could anger some as well. Running in Valadao's seat, even with more Democrats, could also be a challenge because voters in that part of the central San Joaquin Valley have shown that while they might register to vote, actually getting them to vote is another issue.

And running for statewide office from the Valley is always a challenge, especially when Democrats from Los Angeles and the Bay Area will likely also seek the seat.

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