50 Bob Filner (D)

Of San Diego — Elected 1992, 3rd term

Biographical Information

Born: Sept. 4, 1942, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Education: Cornell U., B.A. 1963; U. of Delaware, M.A. 1969; Cornell U., Ph.D. 1973.

Occupation: Public official; college professor.

Family: Wife, Jane Merrill; two children.

Religion: Jewish.

Political Career: San Diego School Board, 1979-83, president, 1982; candidate for San Diego City Council, 1983; San Diego City Council, 1987-92, deputy mayor, 1991.

Capitol Office: 330 Cannon Bldg. 20515; 225-8045.

Committees

Transportation & Infrastructure
Railroads; Surface Transportation

Veterans' Affairs
Benefits (ranking)



In Washington: A one-time aide to Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, Filner is a similarly irrepressible liberal who found himself with many like-minded colleagues in his first term in the 103rd Congress. But after the 1994 election, when voters booted Democrats out of the House majority for the first time in four decades, Filner had a harder time making headway with his philosophy of "practical politics defined by a true commitment to progressive ideals."

A former teacher, Filner came to Congress eager to share the lessons he learned on the San Diego School Board and the City Council. But, like many Democrats, he became disenchanted when Republicans assumed power. "My friends in San Diego . . . say they have never seen me so depressed," Filner told USA Today in June 1995.

Casting about for a role to play in the minority, Filner jumped to the defense of Filipino veterans who have been denied benefits despite their service in World War II. And he argued for a new trust fund to help workers laid off by defense contractors find new jobs.

Eventually, Filner was thrust into the center of a raging debate over the regulation of a wastewater treatment facility in his San Diego district — but, ironically, in this instance he found himself defending an argument that Speaker Newt Gingrich had made his own.

The effort to force San Diego to upgrade its wastewater treatment facility began in 1972, with enactment of tougher federal standards that would have required the city to treat its sewage twice before discharging it into the ocean. San Diego obtained extensions of the deadline for meeting the requirement for years, but the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sued the city in 1988 over its facility at Point Loma, which pumps nearly 200 million gallons of treated sewage into the Pacific Ocean.

City officials like Filner, who at the time served on council, and the EPA battled in court into the 1990s, and in 1994, President Clinton signed a law allowing San Diego to apply for a waiver from the rules. The EPA in June 1995 granted preliminary approval of the waiver.

But GOP lawmakers, led by freshman Brian P. Bilbray, a former San Diego County supervisor, had adopted the issue by then. Bilbray's cause piqued the interest of Gingrich, who saw the local dispute as the ideal platform for a national debate over what many Republicans perceive as unnecessary federal regulations. He chose San Diego's proposed permanent waiver for its wastewater facility as the first item on the "Corrections Day" calendar that he created to overturn such "silly" federal rules quickly.

The debate placed Filner, who later would fight other Republican efforts to alter environmental regulations, in the awkward position of defending the GOP's push to grant San Diego the waiver, which he had sought for eight years, including his first two years in the House. He urged his colleagues to support the bill because "it is the right thing to do for both the environment and the taxpayers of San Diego." The House passed the bill 269-156 in July 1995.

Filner achieved success in the 104th on another parochial matter, the proposed relocation of a fleet of giant Marine Corps helicopters to Miramar Naval Air Base in northern San Diego County. With help from California Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer, he persuaded Clinton to delay the decision to move the 112 helicopters to Miramar because of safety and environmental concerns in densely populated areas around the base.

In June 1996, Filner discussed the issue with Clinton and Navy Secretary John Dalton. Filner, who had endured a tough primary challenge from a more conservative Democrat months earlier, then surprised his constituents at a San Diego rally for Clinton with the news that Clinton would ask the Pentagon to consider moving the helicopters to other bases, including March Air Force Base in Riverside.

Filner and Boxer vowed to continue the battle to keep the helicopters out of Miramar in the 105th Congress. The Pentagon had not scheduled

CALIFORNIA 50
Central and south San Diego; Chula Vista; National City

This ethnic, blue-collar urban-suburban district is a world apart from the districts that surround it. It is far more diverse: 41 percent of its residents are Hispanic, 15 percent are Asian and 14 percent are black. It is also as Democratic as the others are Republican.

The northern part of the district, just south of San Diego's downtown, houses the worst of San Diego's urban problems: its highest crime rates, its most serious gang activity and so on. It is built up with rows of two-story apartment complexes, and while certain parts are being gentrified by "urban pioneers," much of the area is downtrodden.

Farther south, the booming suburb of Chula Vista splits the city of San Diego in two; even more southern areas of San Diego such as San Ysidro and Otay Mesa are contiguous only by a legal line that extends through the bay. Residents of the southern region, cut off geographically from the rest of San Diego, sometimes feel cut off politically as well.

Chula Vista has a large number of military personnel and tends to be more Republican than the rest of the 50th. On Chula Vista's east end is East Lake, one of the county's largest developments. Any new housing growth the 50th experiences is likely to be here; much of the rest of the district is either stagnant or built out.

Otay Mesa is an industrial area south of Chula Vista that represents the last opportunity for expansion of San Diego's large-scale manufacturing. The area is heavily developed between the 5 and 805 freeways, but farther east is mostly empty land zoned for industry.

The San Diego-Tijuana border crossing at San Ysidro is the world's busiest. The area's problems stem not so much from the number of immigrants, but from criminals who prey on them.

But the constant traffic creates an uneasiness that contributes to anti-immigration sentiment in the state. In 1994, that sentiment found expression in a state ballot initiative (Prop. 187) denying all but emergency public benefits to illegal immigrants.

The area is reeling from the loss of General Dynamics, formerly the district's (and the county's) largest private-sector employer. The company sold its Tomahawk missile manufacturing operations in 1992 to Hughes, which closed the San Diego plant and moved manufacturing to Arizona. This signaled the beginning of the end. By 1997, the company had only about 150 employees in the area.

Bill Clinton carried the district in 1992, garnering 49 percent of the votes to 30 percent for George Bush and 21 percent for Ross Perot. Clinton did even better in 1996, capturing 60 percent of the vote to Bob Dole's 32 percent and Perot's 6 percent. In the House race, Filner won re-election with 62 percent, his best showing yet.

1990 Population: 573,463. White 266,652 (46%), Black 82,735 (14%), Other 224,076 (39%). Hispanic origin 232,660 (41%). 18 and over 398,704 (70%), 62 and over 59,801 (10%). Median age: 28.

the move to occur until 1998. "We will try to halt funding for it during the course of the year," Filner said in late 1996, noting that even if the Pentagon decided to send the helicopters to Miramar, civil suits by angry residents who live nearby could delay the transfer.

True to the voting record he amassed as a freshman — which earned him a rating of 100 from the liberal advocacy group Americans for Democratic Action — Filner in his second term consistently opposed the agenda of the Republican majority. And like many California Democrats, he battled at every turn GOP efforts to deny federal benefits to illegal immigrants.

Border crossings by illegal immigrants are a problem in Filner's district, so he has supported more funding for the Border Patrol. But he objects to what he feels is the hostile tone of many who decry illegal immigration. He opposed the 1994 ballot initiative (Prop 187) that sought to disallow illegal aliens from receiving almost all public services (it was overwhelmingly approved). "Let us recognize the basic humanity of all individuals," he said in 1993. "Let us work together to get at the economic development that is so crucial for helping all people have a better way of life."

Filner similarly defended the interests of his immigrant constituents in March 1994, when he objected to a GOP amendment targeting bilingual education.

A member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Filner is in a good position to protect his state's interests in the 105th Congress as lawmakers consider how much to authorize for federal highway programs over the next several years. He also gained a slot as ranking Democrat on the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Benefits.

At Home: Filner in 1994 survived the electoral tide that swept Republicans into control of Congress, but two years later, his liberal views helped make him the target of an intraparty challenge from a moderate Democrat. Juan Vargas, a Hispanic, replaced Filner on the San Diego City Council in 1993 and later was named deputy mayor, another job Filner once held. Touted as a

potential mayoral candidate, Vargas in 1996 instead set his sights on Filner's House seat.

The ethnic makeup of the predominantly minority district, which includes a Hispanic population of 41 percent, played to Vargas' favor. He had tried for the seat in 1992, after it was created in redistricting, but his 19 percent tally in the Democratic primary earned him a fourth-place finish; Filner won that primary with 26 percent.

In 1996, Vargas highlighted his lifelong ties to the district and his social conservatism. He said he decided to make the bid in part because the House, with the help of Filner, had defeated a measure that would have allowed punishment of people who desecrate the U.S. flag. He also opposes abortion, while Filner supports abortion rights.

But Filner's efforts to remind voters of his legislative contributions to the district — grants to improve schools and health clinics and his battle against stricter, and more expensive, sewage treatment standards — paid dividends. He won renomination by 10 points, taking 55 percent of the vote to Vargas' 45 percent.

Republicans targeted Filner for defeat in the general election. But their candidate, Baptist minister Jim Baize, who won the primary by less than 1 percent of the vote on the strength of absentee ballots, faced an uphill battle. Filner secured his largest margin of victory yet, winning 62 percent of the vote.

Filner won the 50th in 1992 just as he had climbed other rungs of the political ladder — with single-minded devotion to fundraising and tireless campaigning. He overcame five adversaries in the Democratic primary, upsetting presumed front-runners state Sen. Wadie P. Deddeh and ex-Rep. Jim Bates.

Bates was trying to return to Congress. Republican Randy "Duke" Cunningham ousted him in 1990 after the House ethics committee reproved him for sexually harassing staff aides. Deddeh, a real estate developer and state legislator since the 1960s, assumed the mantle of Democratic front-runner as Bates faltered. But Filner attacked him for his opposition to abortion and his apparent failure to make timely payments on property taxes.

Filner had the strong support of labor and women's groups. And he made a concerted effort to win minority voters, undeterred by the presence of a Latino and a black activist on the ballot. Filner's credentials were enhanced considerably by his history as an early civil right Freedom Rider (he was imprisoned for a time after sitting in at a Mississippi lunch counter in 1960) and his years as an activist in San Diego politics. He 26 percent tally put him 3 points ahead of Deddeh.

Filner, who moved to California from New York in 1970 to teach at San Diego State University, dispatched Republican Tony Valencia in the general election, taking 57 percent of the vote. In 1994, he easily won a second term.

HOUSE ELECTIONS

1996 General		
Bob Filner (D)	73,200	(62%)
Jim Baize (R)	38,351	(32%)
Dan Clark (REF)	3,253	(3%)
Earl M. Shepard (NL)	2,138	(2%)
Philip Zoebisch (LIBERT)	1,398	(1%)
1996 Primary		
Bob Filner (D)	18,809	(55%)
Juan Vargas (D)	15,673	(45%)
1994 General		
Bob Filner (D)	59,214	(57%)
Mary Alice Acevedo (R)	36,955	(35%)
Ricardo Duenez (LIBERT)	3,326	(3%)
Guillermo Ramirez (PFP)	3,002	(3%)
Kip Krueger (GREEN)	1,954	(2%)

Previous Winning Percentages: 1992 (57%)

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

	Receipts	Receipts from PACs	Expenditures
1996			
Filner (D)	$1,135,190	$490,480 (43%)	$1,142,370
Baize (R)	$129,225	$13,171 (10%)	$120,562
1994			
Filner (D)	$832,812	$434,300 (52%)	$818,051
Acevedo (R)	$353,023	$83,258 (24%)	$352,091

DISTRICT VOTE FOR PRESIDENT

1996		1992	
D	78,881 (60%)	**D**	69,546 (49%)
R	42,730 (32%)	**R**	42,830 (30%)
I	7,764 (6%)	**I**	30,267 (21%)

KEY VOTES

1997	
Ban "partial birth" abortions	N
1996	
Approve farm bill	N
Deny public education to illegal immigrants	N
Repeal ban on certain assault-style weapons	N
Increase minimum wage	Y
Freeze defense spending	Y
Approve welfare overhaul	N
1995	
Approve balanced-budget constitutional amendment	N
Relax Clean Water Act regulations	N
Oppose limits on environmental regulations	#
Reduce projected Medicare spending	N
Approve GOP budget with tax and spending cuts	N

VOTING STUDIES

	Presidential Support		Party Unity		Conservative Coalition	
Year	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**
1996	77	13	90	2	12	86
1995	86	8	92	4	14	82
1994	79	21	98	2	17	83
1993	77	23	96	4	9	91

INTEREST GROUP RATINGS

Year	ADA	AFL-CIO	CCUS	ACU
1996	90	n/a	29	0
1995	80	100	17	9
1994	100	78	50	0
1993	100	100	9	8

ZIP CODES

California's 50th District

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