

Close Window

Send To Printer

Capitol power shift stirs Valley

Dreier says he still has influence in D.C.

By Fred Ortega Staff Writer
San Gabriel Valley Tribune

Tuesday's momentous shift in the political balance of Congress had immediate repercussions in the San Gabriel Valley.

Overnight, powerful local Republican leaders such as Rep. David Dreier found themselves in the minority, while western Valley Democrats like Adam Schiff suddenly hold the political advantage.

In the electoral aftermath, both sides have promised to proceed in the spirit of cooperation, putting aside partisanship to advance the interests of all of their constituents throughout the Valley.

But some fear that this local shift in political power could mean that San Gabriel Valley priorities continue to take a back seat to projects and issues in the larger - and more Democratic - expanses of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley and West Side.

Dreier, a seasoned veteran, was first elected in 1980, and was in the minority in his first 14 years in Congress. The Glendora Republican was upbeat about his prospects to continue to promote San Gabriel Valley projects like the Gold Line light-rail extension to Montclair and the Alameda Corridor East.

"The Gold Line continues to be so important, and it really impacts all of the surrounding cities, from Pasadena and Los Angeles all the way to the Inland Empire," said Dreier, who is expected to turn over the chairmanship of the House Rules Committee in January to ranking Democrat Louise Slaughter of New York.

Even after 12 years in the majority, Dreier was unable to get the Gold Line extension too far ahead of competing interests to the west. Only \$20 million in federal transportation funds have been appropriated for the project, while Los Angeles critics have argued federal money would be better spent on subway extensions from Los Angeles to the West Side.

Despite his loss of clout, Dreier said he hopes to continue to develop his close working relationships with neighboring Democrats like Schiff and Rep. Grace Napolitano of Santa Fe Springs. He also suggested holding an informal meeting with Valley representatives to coordinate on issues such as the Gold Line.

Dreier remains close to President Bush, said Jack Pitney, professor of government at Claremont McKenna College. That, coupled with his previous bipartisan relationships, makes Dreier valuable to local Democrats as well as to his constituents.

"When you have a friend in the White House, you are in a good position to help your constituents," Pitney said. "I think the Democrats regard him as somebody you can do business with."

But Dreier's connections to the administration might not be enough to keep at bay a politically empowered Los Angeles and its accompanying infrastructure needs, said Michael Cano, transportation deputy for county Supervisor Michael Antonovich.

"With the subway to Santa Monica, or as the supervisor calls it the 'Drain to the Sea,' you are going to have a huge ramp up of support for that," said Cano. "Henry Waxman has been a big supporter for that, so it will be a huge competitor for the Gold Line and Alameda Corridor East."

The Alameda Corridor East, a freight rail line that traverses the Valley, is critical to transporting goods out of the busy ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Cano said the project is already halfway funded and has widespread support because of its importance in moving trade goods from the largest shipping container complex in the nation.

But the Gold Line faces much more opposition, especially from Los Angeles. A spokesman for county Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who supports the construction of the Exposition Line through the West Side, said the Gold Line extension does not merit support regardless of what party holds the upper hand in the San Gabriel Valley.

"The argument against the Gold Line is that there is already a Metrolink line going out there," said the spokesman, Joel Bellman.

But the Gold Line extension is crucial to the success of the first leg of the line, which runs from Union Station to Pasadena, said Schiff. His district includes Alhambra, Altadena, Pasadena, San Gabriel and Temple City.

Schiff said he has worked closely with Dreier on issues as varied as transportation and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which is sandwiched between their districts.

"There were issues we disagreed on," he said, "and I might be wearing the majority hat now - which is the way I like it - but it won't get in the way of progress on these important local infrastructure and science measures."

But the Gold Line is going to need a lot more help from Washington if it is going to be extended. The project is going to cost about \$1 billion, said Habib Balian, CEO of the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Authority.

"Traffic knows no party," said Balian. "We have a corridor between Pasadena and Montclair that is very congested, and it goes through three congressional districts. They have all helped us in getting political support."

fred.ortega@sgvn.com

(626) 962-8811, Ext. 2306