LA Congressional: Chu, Cedillo, Pleitez Racing to Run-off?

Politics 2009-05-18 09:24:30

Washington, DC - The race to succeed Hilda Solis in California's 32nd Congressional District is flying to a Tuesday primary vote that may not yield a single winner, but could force a runoff for the Democratic Party nomination. The special election on May 19 is drawing increasing attention to Emanuel Pleitez. With his fresh blood in Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley politics, some Washington insiders are sensing a possible tight finish with Pleitez and the two establishment politicians, Judy Chu and Gil Cedillo. The wild card is voter turn out. Light voter turn out could give a highly motivated but smaller constituency a decisive advantage. A big turn out means that motivation has to spread itself out and connect with a lot more folks.

Pleitez is distinguishing himself from Chu and Cedillo by saying he'll bring his economic expertise to D.C. to help stem foreclosures, reopen lines of credit and more carefully guide federal and stimulus spending to promote economic growth. As a product of both a troubled public high school and one of the nation's top universities, education is also of particular importance to Pleitez. The candidate is a strong supporter of the DREAM Act and is intent on addressing the nation's dropout rate. Parts of the 32nd Congressional District have drop out rates as high as 50 percent.

For many, Pleitez represents the emergence of a new generation that's coming of age politically: At 26 years old, his rapid ascension through the political establishment has been described by the Huffington Post as "nothing short of inspiring." In a state where politicians are mostly associated with crisis, Pleitez is demonstrating the energy and optimism to carry forward the promise of change that sprouted last November.

Pleitez's credentials as one of two California members of President Obama's Treasury Transition Team leave him well equipped to understand the nuances of the policy conversations geared at righting the economy – a stark contrast to less experienced legislators who, in recent Capitol Hill hearings, got lost in the discussions of economic policy. His Goldman financial services experience also gives him hands-on insight in how the world of finance actually works.

Pleitez presents a compelling story that begins and ends with the communities of East Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley. He was born in El Sereno, in the district's westernmost area, to a single mother and began taking on adult responsibilities like balancing the family budget and translating for his mother while in grade school. After achieving in athletics and academics in high school, Pleitez attended Stanford University, where he expanded his political repertoire working in the offices Senator Tom Daschle, then-Senator Hillary Clinton and Antonio Villaraigosa when he was a City Councilman, and on the campaigns of Senator John Kerry and Barack Obama during their presidential bids.

After tenures of public service with the likes of the Voto Latino, the League of Women Voters and the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, and two years in the private sector at Goldman Sachs, Pleitez is back home in East Los Angeles to take on two long-standing Southern California politicos in a race that's been dubbed by the Los Angeles Times as "a harbinger of future Los Angeles-area politics," mainly because of the district's ethnic divide. The district is about 60 percent Latino and about 20 percent Asian American, and the remaining 20 percent is split among whites and African Americans.

Pleitez's mother emigrated from Mexico to the U.S. and his father is from El Salvador. The other two primary contenders, Gil Cedillo and Judy Chu, are Latino and Asian American, respectively. If elected, Pleitez would be the first

Congressman with both Mexican and Salvadorean lineage.

“I think that, to a certain extent, Emanuel and his campaign for Congress transcend race,” said Leticia Ramirez, the Pleitez for Congress campaign manager and friend of Pleitez from his Stanford days. “There’s an overwhelming instinct to look at this race in purely racial terms, but as Emanuel and our staff know it’s really about what’s best for schools, hospitals, transportation infrastructure and pension plans. A lot of the voters we’ve been talking to are looking for someone new to tackle these problems,” Ramirez said.

One of the main challenges the Pleitez campaign faces is the heavy institutional backing garnered by Cedillo and Chu, who between them have spent more than two decades embroiled in the trenches of California politics. At this point, both boast high-level endorsements and deep-pocketed donors, and both have out-fundraised (and out-spent) him.

Pleitez hopes to neutralize the financial advantages of his opponents through a robust “ground-game,” reminiscent of Obama's campaign in last year's presidential election. Pleitez has 60 full-time volunteers with professional backgrounds in politics, advocacy, finance and communications, all tasked with pounding the pavement to spread the message. So far the campaign has moved the needle without the help of PACs but with more than 2,100 donors. Many of these are considered small donors because they’ve given between $1 and $100.

“We’re running an aggressive grassroots campaign. We were the first to open a campaign office in the district and we were the first to start talking to voters, so we think that puts us in a good position with voters out here” Pleitez said.

If you’re looking for an upbeat message to take you to the polls, check out Pleitez’ music video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2RYAbOJe68 .

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WHERE :

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