

Chu clinches victory in congressional primary

By Rebecca Kimitch, Staff Writer

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State Board of Equalization member Judy Chu has won the primary election Tuesday to replace former Rep. Hilda Solis representing much of the San Gabriel Valley in Congress.

Though Judy Chu's lead in the race was substantial, she did not win the 50 percent of votes necessary to avoid a general election for the 32nd Congressional District seat. Instead, the Democrat will face her distant cousin, Republican Betty Tom Chu, a Monterey Park councilwoman, in a general election July 14.

Still, Judy Chu is likely headed to Congress.



Volunteers and supporters of Judy Chu tally votes from different precincts during the special election day at Chu's campaign headquarters in Baldwin Park on Tuesday. (Watchara Phomicinda/ Staff)

She claimed 32 percent of votes - just over 15,000 votes, with all the precincts counted. Her main Democratic rival, state Sen. Gil Cedillo, came in second, with 23 percent of votes. And political newcomer Emanuel Pleitez, a 26-year-old financial analyst and also a Democrat, came in third, with 14 percent.

"I am so happy and overwhelmed by the great results," Judy Chu said.

In the Republican race, Betty Tom Chu beat out restaurateur Teresa Hernandez, who was favored among the Republican party and spent \$100,000 on her campaign - significantly more than any the other GOP candidate. Betty Tom Chu won 10 percent of the vote to Hernandez's 9 percent. David Truax, a former mayor of Covina, took 6 percent.

All 13 candidates in the race, including one Republican write-in candidate, faced off on the same ballot. Since no one got more than 50 percent of the vote, the top vote-getters from each party move on to the general election.

With Democrats outnumbering Republicans in the district more than 2-1, Judy Chu is expected to win easily.

"Democrats will vote for a Democrat," she said, adding that she wasn't sure how much she would campaign in the coming months.

Solis gave up the seat when she was sworn in as Labor Secretary in February.

Throughout the primary race, many political analysts questioned whether Judy Chu, a Chinese-



American, could beat Cedillo, a well-known Latino, in the largely Latino district, which extends from East L.A. through Monterey Park, Rosemead, South El Monte, El Monte, Baldwin park, West Covina, Azusa, Duarte and Covina

But Chu won many early endorsements from Latinos, as well as the support of many labor unions, including the powerful County Federation of Labor. She also had a large base of local support that stemmed from various municipal and legislative offices she has held in the district.

"It's amazing the way this campaign came together. When I first started, there was a lot of skepticism. But then it started with the endorsement of (Los Angeles Mayor Antonio) Villaraigosa, then labor came ... it culminated until it changed and I became the front-runner," Judy Chu said.

"(Judy) Chu ran a superior campaign. If she wins you have to credit a very-well-put-together campaign, and a congressional candidate that got key endorsements in Latino community," political consultant Allan Hoffenblum said before the polls were closed.

Most analysts said turnout would be vital in the race and that a lower turnout would benefit Judy Chu.

"It's all about the turnout. Turnout, turnout, turnout," Los Angeles-based political consultant Hal Dash said.

Approximately 20 percent of registered voters voted in the election - halfway between what Judy Chu expected and what Cedillo had hoped for.

Cedillo's campaign manager Derek Humphrey said the campaign was disappointed by both the results and the turnout.

Although the campaign focused initially on likely voters, a large number of volunteers allowed it to reach out to voters considered less likely to vote, Humphrey said.

Cedillo and Chu each had hundreds of campaign workers and volunteers knocking on doors in the district over the weekend, and about 500 in the district Tuesday alone.

Hugo Salazar, 27, drove from San Diego to volunteer for the campaign after he learned Cedillo didn't have support from the Democratic party.

"He has done a lot for undocumented members of the community. The same way he has stood up for us, we have to stand up for him," Salazar said.

While voters trickled into polls throughout most of the day, by 6 p.m. a steady stream of voters was entering the precinct at Shirpsier Elementary in El Monte.

"I have been very surprised for a special election ... I am very pleased at the turnout," said David Leeper, a supervisor at the precinct.

"My parents encourage me to vote, since they can't vote here - they aren't citizens of the United States - so they encourage me to vote for whomever I chose," 18-year-old Gabriela Hernandez said outside the precinct.

Hernandez, like many voters outside precincts Tuesday, wouldn't say which congressional candidate she supported. But many voters were vocal in their opposition to the half a dozen state budget-related propositions that shared the ballot. Most of the propositions were soundly rejected.

Although the 12 candidates in the congressional race spent more than \$2 million to attract voters, many voters said they were brought to the polls by the propositions.

"My husband just lost his job, and now they want us to keep paying higher taxes? Every time we vote, they want us to pay more. No way," said Rosa Villagran, who works for the El Monte school district.

Chu campaign volunteer Ron Hansel of West Covina said voters were "getting sick and tired" of all the mailers, phone calls and home visits from campaign workers.

"I just tell them this election is very important to us, and that is why they are getting inundated," he said.

rebecca.kimitch@sgvn.com

(626) 962-8811, Ext. 2105