



Image courtesy of the Member

## *Xavier Becerra* 1958–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1993–  
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Xavier Becerra had barely completed one term in the California state assembly when he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. During his career in Washington, Becerra has emerged as a Democratic leader, becoming the first Latino in the history of the House to sit on the powerful Ways and Means Committee and being elected twice by his colleagues to serve as the Vice Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus.

Xavier Becerra was born in Sacramento, California, on January 26, 1958, the third of four children to working-class parents Maria Teresa and Manuel Becerra. He majored in economics and graduated in 1980 from Stanford University, near Palo Alto, California, becoming the first member of his family to earn a bachelor's degree.<sup>1</sup> He stayed on at Stanford, earning a law degree in 1984, before working as an aide to a California state senator and then becoming a California deputy attorney general. After Becerra moved to Los Angeles, community leaders encouraged him to run for the state assembly in 1990.<sup>2</sup> Becerra was young and relatively unknown, and his victory that year galvanized a new generation of Latino politicians.<sup>3</sup> Before the expiration of Becerra's first term in the state assembly, venerable Los Angeles Democrat Edward R. Roybal retired from the U.S. House. California had just redrawn its congressional districts, shifting the border of Roybal's 30th District westward from East Los Angeles to Hollywood. When one of Roybal's top aides declined to run, Becerra entered the race, receiving the outgoing Congressman's support. In a crowded primary, the 34-year-old Becerra—self-described as “pro-active” and “independent”—won the party nod with 58 percent of the vote and easily captured the general election that fall.<sup>4</sup> Currently representing California's 31st District, he has won every congressional election since 1992 by overwhelming majorities.<sup>5</sup> In 2001 Becerra ran for mayor of Los Angeles but lost in a heated election. Becerra and his wife, Dr. Carolina Reyes, have three daughters: Clarisa, Olivia, and Natalia.<sup>6</sup>

In the House, Becerra continues to champion the causes of underprivileged communities, aided in large measure by powerful committee assignments. Early in his congressional career, he served on the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (103rd Congress, 1993–1995), the Committee on Education and Labor (103rd–104th Congresses, 1993–1997), and the Committee on the Judiciary (103rd–104th Congresses).<sup>7</sup> He has supported educational programs in areas with disadvantaged children, including Los Angeles, and from his seat on the Judiciary Committee, Becerra has become a leader in debates about America's immigration and welfare systems. Recognizing his determined

early efforts, Democratic leaders placed Becerra on the influential Committee on Ways and Means, where he has served since the 105th Congress (1997–1999).<sup>8</sup> He joined the Committee on the Budget in the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), and in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Becerra was appointed to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction.

An advocate of tighter gun regulations, Becerra also has opposed English-only education and supported tax measures to keep jobs in the entertainment industry in the United States.<sup>9</sup> As a more senior member of the Ways and Means Committee, Becerra continues to work to broaden the scope of Social Security, bolster Medicare, and make more opportunities available to the needy.<sup>10</sup> In 2008 Becerra was considered by then-President-elect Barack Obama for the Cabinet office of U.S. Trade Representative, to advise him on international trade issues.<sup>11</sup>

Representative Becerra is active in numerous House organizations, including the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC), the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC). His early success led one Latino California politician to call Becerra “our shining star.”<sup>12</sup> The CHC elected him chairman in 1997 (105th Congress), and in the spring of 2008, he worked across the aisle with Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) to push through a measure to add a national museum for the American Latino to the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>13</sup> Becerra was elected one of three freshman whips in 1993, and he remains active in the House Democratic Caucus. His colleagues approved his appointment as Assistant to the Speaker in 2006, a position that involved working closely with party leadership to craft policy. Becerra was elected Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus in November 2008 and was re-elected for a second term in November 2010. Additionally, Becerra sits on the Smithsonian Board of Regents, which manages the institution’s collection of art and artifacts.<sup>14</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “Xavier Becerra,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

## NOTES

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4 *Politics in America, 1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1995): 157; Guy Gugliotta, “Stakes Are Enormous in Contest for California’s 52 House Seats,” 1 June 1992, *Washington Post*: A6; George Ramos, “Assemblyman Becerra to Seek Rep. Roybal’s Seat,” 29 February 1992, *Los Angeles Times*: B3; Michael S. Arnold, “Latinos Make Political Gains,” 18 June 1992, *Los Angeles Times* (nuestro tiempo edition): 1. As quoted in Andres Chavez, “Hot Contest Shaping up for Congress Seat,” 21 May 1992, *Los Angeles Times* (nuestro tiempo edition): 1.

5 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.

6 “Official Biography of Xavier Becerra,” [http://becerra.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&cid=13&Itemid=16](http://becerra.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&cid=13&Itemid=16) (accessed 29 May 2012).

7 Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011): 579.

8 “Welcome Teamwork on Immigration,” 16 March 1994, *Los Angeles Times*: B6; Ruben Navarrette, Jr., “Immigration Ghosts Haunt the Hispanic Caucus,” 20 March 1994, *Los Angeles Times*: M2; Alan C. Miller, “The Washington Connection: Two Faces of Immigration Debate,” 2 July 1993, *Los Angeles Times*: A3; *Politics in America, 1996*: 156; Karen Tumulty, “Jobless Bill Snared in Immigration Issue,” 15 October 1993, *Los Angeles Times*: A14; *Politics in America, 1998* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1997): 171; James Bornemeier, “Rising Star Builds a More Visible Platform,” 24 November 1996, *Los Angeles Times*: A3.

9 *Almanac of American Politics, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2001): 239; *Almanac of American Politics, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2003): 246–247.

10 “Official Biography of Xavier Becerra,” <http://becerra.house.gov/HoR/CA31/About+Xavier/> (accessed 3 March 2010).

11 *Almanac of American Politics, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, 2009): 221.

12 As quoted in Arnold, “Latinos Make Political Gains.”

13 *Almanac of American Politics, 2010*: 221.

14 Ibid; Jennifer Yachnin, “Becerra Takes Rare Tack in Caucus Race,” 25 September 2006, *Roll Call*: 1; Carl Hulse, “Pelosi Names Maryland Congressman to Lead Democratic Campaign Efforts,” 20 December 2006, *New York Times*: A27; S. A. Miller and Tom LoBianco, “Waxman Bid to Head Energy Boosted,” 20 November 2008, *Washington Times*: A1; “Official Biography of Xavier Becerra,” [http://becerra.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&cid=13&Itemid=16](http://becerra.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&cid=13&Itemid=16) (accessed 29 May 2012).