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Ami Bera 1965–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2013–
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

In 2012 Ami Bera became the third Indian American elected to Congress when he defeated a longtime incumbent. Trained as a physician, he focuses on health care legislation. “My parents emigrated here from India in the 1950s with very little but the dream of a better life,” Bera said. “I grew up believing America was a land of opportunity, where if you worked hard and played by the rules, you could reach your full potential.”¹

Ami Bera was born on March 2, 1965, in Los Angeles, California. His mother was a public school teacher, and his father was an engineer and small-business owner.² Bera earned a bachelor of science degree in biological sciences from the University of California, Irvine, in 1987 and earned an MD degree from the same university in 1991.

Bera has been a physician for more than 25 years and practices internal medicine. He also served as the part-time medical director of care management for a seven-hospital system in the Sacramento area in the late 1990s. Bera was the chief medical officer for Sacramento County from 1999 to 2004. He also taught at the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine and served as associate dean from 2004 to 2008. Bera is married to Dr. Janine Bera, and the couple has one daughter, Sydra.

Bera made an unsuccessful attempt in 2010 to unseat Republican Congressman Dan Lungren in a close race that drew national attention.³ In 2012 Bera challenged Lungren again in a new district that encompassed the eastern Sacramento suburbs, home to tech and health care businesses.⁴ In California’s new open primary, in which all candidates run in the primary and the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, compete in the general election, Bera trailed Lungren by 13 percentage points.⁵ Endorsed by former President William J. (Bill) Clinton and the *Sacramento Bee*, Bera touted his long experience in health care and efforts to defend women’s health and reproductive rights.⁶ The race was too close to call on Election Day and remained undecided for more than a week. On November 16, 2012, Lungren conceded.⁷ The final tally put Bera up with 52 percent of the vote. Bera won re-election in 2014 with a 50.4 percent majority and in 2016 with 51 percent.⁸ Bera has served on the Foreign Affairs and the Science, Space, and Technology Committees in the 113th, 114th, and 115th Congresses (2013–2019).

Bera’s primary legislative focus is general access to medical care. He has opposed cuts to Medicare and advocated increasing the number of doctors in

the Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system, noting that veterans have waited up to two months for appointments. “Now, these are men and women who stepped up to answer the call to duty, to protect our freedoms ... and we need to give them that same duty when they return,” he said on the House Floor. “You have to have the necessary health care professionals that can address these needs in a timely manner.”⁹

Bera introduced legislation easing immigration restrictions for doctors and medical students, expanding health savings account benefits for children under age 27, and implementing best practices and standards in VA facilities.¹⁰ His first bill in Congress recognized National Minority Cancer Awareness Week. “Despite medical advances that save many lives in our country,” he noted, “there’s been limited progress in ending the racial and ethnic disparities in health.”¹¹ He also sponsored the Dispose Responsibly of Your Pills (DROP) Act to make more disposal sites available for unwanted prescription medication.¹²

Bera has been an outspoken proponent of women’s health, including protecting a woman’s right to make reproductive choices. He submitted the Women’s Preventive Health Awareness Campaign Act in direct response to the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which prohibited late-term abortion.¹³ Bera’s bill directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to implement a public outreach campaign for women’s preventive health.¹⁴ He invoked his experience as a medical doctor on this issue, noting his bill was “not only smart medicine; it will get to the core of empowering patients, of empowering women and of empowering families to make the decisions that best fit within the context of their lives.”¹⁵

Bera also sought aid to alleviate California’s drought in 2014, noting that Folsom Lake, a water supply for many of his constituents, had nearly emptied.¹⁶ He opposed a bill seeking to divert water to southern California by repealing environmental regulations protecting fish runs. He noted that the drought could not pit sections of the state against each other and supported later legislation that balanced long- and short-term drought solutions.¹⁷

NOTES

- 1 “Ami Bera Sworn into 113th Congress,” 3 January 2013, States News Service.
- 2 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 1st sess. (20 March 2013): H1711.
- 3 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2013): 157.
- 4 *Politics in America, 2014* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2013): 84; *Almanac of American Politics, 2014*: 156.
- 5 Torey Van Oot, “Lungren-Bera Rematch Part of Democratic Effort to Retake House,” 9 June 2012, *Sacramento Bee*: A3.
- 6 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014*: 157; Laurel Rosenhall, “Capitol Alert: Bill Clinton Stumps for California Dems in Tight Congressional Races,” 9 October 2012, *Sacramento Bee*: n.p.; Torey Van Oot, “Capitol Alert: Ami Bera Puts Focus on Women’s Health Issues in Final Stretch,” 30 October 2012, *Sacramento Bee*: n.p.
- 7 “Rep. Lungren Concedes Defeat in Calif.,” 17 November 2012, United Press International.
- 8 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 9 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (25 July 2015): H6849.
- 10 H.R. 2484, 113th Cong. (2013); H.R. 4951, 113th Cong. (2014); H.R. 1272, 114th Cong. (2015); H.R. 5465, 113th Cong. (2014); H.R. 3951, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 11 Remarks made in recognition of National Minority Health Month, see *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 1st sess. (25 April 2013): H2313; for the designation of National Minority Cancer Awareness Week, see H. Res. 154, 113th Cong. (2013).
- 12 H.R. 2463, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 13 H.R. 2457, 113th Cong. (2013). The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Act was submitted as H.R. 1797, 113th Cong. (2013) and H.R. 36, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 14 H.R. 2457, 113th Cong. (2013); H.R. 2355, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 15 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 1st sess. (18 June 2013): H3691.
- 16 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (5 February 2014): H1621.
- 17 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (4 February 2014): H1552.