

THE LAKE

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A passion for justice

Mary Ahlfors Helvie interviews EastLake resident and Congressman Bob Filner to find out what makes him tick

"I love jogging around EastLake," Congressman Bob Filner said. "It's fascinating to watch the development of the area and see how rapidly it's changing."

He has lived in the EastLake community for a little more than a year and works hard daily to achieve his goals.

Filner, 59, was born in Pittsburgh, and raised in New York City. He is married to Jane Merrill and has two children: daughter Erin, a high school teacher in New York, and son Adam, a waiter in San Diego. He holds a bachelor's degree from Cornell University, a master's from the University of Delaware, and his doctorate from Cornell. He is one of only 18 members of Congress to hold a Ph.D.

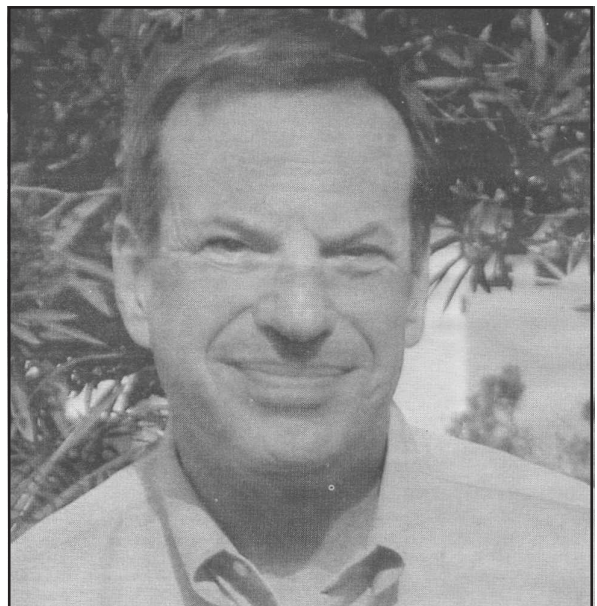
He taught at San Diego State for 20 years. He became interested in politics when his children were in school and was elected to the San Diego City Schools Board of Education. He was elected to San Diego City Council in 1987 and to Congress in 1992. After redistricting, he will represent the 51st Congressional District, which includes Chula Vista, National City, southern San Diego, and all of Imperial County.

He is learning Spanish. "I am trying to become bilingual at an age where it's very difficult," he said.

It is especially important in my dealings with Mexican officials. I feel it is more respectful and more powerful for me to be able to speak to them in Spanish instead of asking them to speak to me in English."

In his spare time he enjoys playing the piano. The Filners love to go to the movies when they can. But the congressman has little spare time.

"My father instilled in me a keen sense of the importance of helping others. I am trying to make the world a better place by representing people who traditionally have not had the power nor economic clout to better their own lives," he said.



Congressman Bob Filner loves jogging around EastLake, watching the development of the area and seeing how rapidly it's changing.

The population of his district is extremely diverse. "Our region is influenced greatly by its proximity to the border," he said. "We have a special bi-national culture with constant interplay and many special challenges involving the environment, sewage, transportation and drugs that people from other parts of the country don't understand."

"There are many people who cross the border every day - to shop, or to visit a family member," he said. "I want to make the border crossing process more efficient so that those reliable crossers can get to their jobs and schools. Many people don't realize that a more efficient border is also a safer border because border agents have more time to concentrate on those who present a real threat to

our country.”

“It is important we reach consensus at the local, state, and federal levels on such important issues as border policy, transportation, and education. Traditionally, there has not been consensus in the political community on how to deal with these issues.” Filner said his ultimate goal is to work to help the country’s politicians attain this consensus.

“There are many things that need our attention,” he said.

Community: “Traffic is the major issue facing the South Bay. We need better alternatives to cars. An efficient rapid transit transportation system utilizing buses and trolleys could relieve major congestion.”

He said he would like to see a mass transportation system that would connect major business and residential areas in the county as well as the educational communities. “Southwestern College is a major destination point. It would be ideal if we could connect Southwestern College with the population centers it serves. I hope it will be possible to develop this through local, state, and federal commitment.”

“The diversification of the economy of this area is the key to providing employment,” he said. “We need to provide jobs to develop

middle class income. Currently, it appears the only jobs available are fast food or high tech - nothing in between. We do not have an economic sector that draws people with working class skills to the area. I have proposed the establishment of a maritime industry - a working port, connected by rail to the rest of the nation, that would develop a middle class income for this area.”

The state: “Electricity continues to be a key problem as well as education. Lower class size has helped, but we need to find resources to continue it in other grades. There is a need for all children, especially in this area, to be bilingual and to start learning a second language in the early grades. Learning a second language enhances the development of one’s mind. We just have to find a way to do it.”

The nation: “The focus of the whole country has been on fighting terrorism and providing security at our airports. During a recent tour of our port, I found it to be very much unprotected. The number of Coast Guard personnel assigned to this area is small. We need to begin concentrating our security on ports, trains, nuclear reactors, major highways, and bridges.”

Social Security: “This issue continues to be important. I am working with individuals to ensure

payments are not lost to those most in need of them. For a veteran family, when a death results in a spouse receiving only 30 percent instead 55 percent of a Social Security payment, it is extremely devastating.

Republicans want to privatize the system. Social Security is a safety net, not a retirement plan. If people are allowed to invest Social Security funds, they may lose all their money. We should not gamble with our Social Security funds. It is also important that people provide for their retirement in other ways.”

Medicare: “Medicare is a successful program. However, we need to address the issue of prescription drugs and find some way to help finance this. It would cost \$40-\$50 billion a year. We have the money to do so if we use it wisely. It’s not fair that people must choose between paying rent, buying food or purchasing necessary medication.”

Long-term care: “Another extremely important issue is long term medical care. The cost of long-term care can bankrupt most families. We must find ways to ensure that people are able to live their last years with dignity.”

“Unfortunately we are facing a deficit at both the state and national levels due to tax policies and laws that wiped out a great deal of our surplus,” he said.