

Dennis A. Cardoza

1959–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2003–2012
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Dennis Cardoza was elected as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002 after defeating his former boss in the Democratic primary, and became a staple on the powerful Agriculture Committee. A self-styled “raging moderate,” Cardoza often enlisted bipartisan support for his projects while pursuing the interests of his largely agricultural-based constituency in central California. “You’re paid to make the tough choices,” he commented shortly after his election, “and you’re paid to do the right thing.”¹

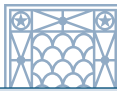
The son of dairy farmers turned business owners, Cardoza was born in Merced, California, on March 31, 1959. Like many in California’s Central Valley, Cardoza was of Portuguese descent; his grandparents emigrated from the Azores during the 1920s.² After interning on Capitol Hill and graduating from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a bachelor’s degree in government and politics, Cardoza returned to California, where he won a spot on the Atwater city council in 1984. He worked for then-state assemblyman Gary Condit, transferring to Washington when Condit won election to the U.S. House of Representatives. After his stint as an aide, Cardoza returned to California, where he took over his family’s bowling alley company. He moved back to Merced and served on its city council from 1994 to 1996, when he was elected to California’s general assembly. Cardoza served in the state assembly for six years, eventually chairing its rules committee.³ But when Condit’s congressional career unraveled amid a highly publicized scandal, Cardoza, who was facing a term limit in the state assembly, challenged the incumbent in the district’s Democratic primary in 2002.⁴ One of the year’s few competitive races, the election for California’s recently redrawn 18th District attracted widespread attention.⁵ Cardoza won the primary election handily and then defeated his Republican challenger in the

general election, taking 51 percent of the vote. After that, he faced virtually no opposition in the party primary and dominated each of his subsequent general elections.⁶

Cardoza married Dr. Kathleen McLoughlin, and they have three children: Joey, Brittany Mari, and Elaina.

Known as an energetic lawmaker willing to pursue bipartisan compromise, Cardoza initially used appointments to the Agriculture, Resources, and Science Committees in the 108th Congress (2003–2005) to legislate on pollution and water-access issues that were of great importance to his agricultural district. During the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Cardoza continued his tenure on the Agriculture Committee and the Resources Committee (later renamed Natural Resources) but left the Committee on Science for a seat on International Relations (later renamed Foreign Affairs). He worked to improve the conditions for the nation’s farmers, introducing efforts to facilitate communication between local, state, and federal authorities during environmental disasters and crop failures. Early on, Cardoza championed renewable sources of energy such as solar power. He also took a notable interest in reforming the country’s foster care system after he and his wife repeatedly experienced frustrations as adoptive parents.⁷ Cardoza also was committed to helping homeowners and mortgage holders and successfully spearheaded efforts to erect a University of California campus in Merced, which opened in 2005.⁸ His skill as a legislator earned him a coveted spot on the Rules Committee for the 110th Congress (2007–2009). Although he gave up seats on Foreign Affairs and Natural Resources, he kept his spot on the Committee on Agriculture, having become chairman of its Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture in time to help draft the 2008 Farm Bill. In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Cardoza sat on the Foreign Affairs and Agriculture Committees.





In addition to his committee work, Cardoza took an active role in caucus and party leadership. A member of the Blue Dog Coalition, which he co-chaired during the 109th Congress, Cardoza opposed continued federal borrowing and advocated offsetting costs in real time, writing “quite simply it’s high time our country starts paying for what it buys.”⁹ A member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) for his entire congressional career, Cardoza also was elected to the powerful Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, a leadership group responsible for Members for committee assignments. In 2008 Cardoza co-chaired a program initiated by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which helps fund and support Democratic campaigns in the House.¹⁰

In October 2011, Representative Cardoza announced that he would retire from the House at the conclusion of the 112th Congress in January 2013. He resigned his seat on August 15, 2012.¹¹

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Dennis A. Cardoza,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2001): 102; as quoted in Jim Miller, “Cardoza Ready to Tackle New Job in Congress,” 9 November 2002, *Fresno Bee*: B2.
- 2 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2007): 106–107.
- 3 “Official Biography of Dennis Cardoza,” <http://cardoza.house.gov/biography/> (accessed 29 May 2012); *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 2005): 214–215; *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: CQ-Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 99–100.
- 4 Jim Miller, “Cardoza to Reveal Bid for Condit Seat,” 23 October 2001, *Fresno Bee*: B4.
- 5 B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., “Political Briefing,” 27 January 2002, *New York Times*: A24; Evelyn Nieves, “Condit Loses House Race to Former Aide,” 6 March 2002, *New York Times*: A15; Michael Doyle, “Cardoza Enjoying Political Capital: Condit’s Challenger Gets Endorsements Usually Reserved for Incumbents,” 5 February 2002, *Fresno Bee*: A1.
- 6 *Politics in America, 2002*: 102; “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>; Mark Grossi, Matt Leedy and Marc Benjamin, “Condit Loses House Re-Election Run: Dennis Cardoza to Face Republican Dick Monteith in November,” 6 March 2002, *Fresno Bee*: A1.
- 7 Michael Doyle, “Close to His Heart: Adoptive Parent Rep. Cardoza Writes Bill Targeting Foster Care,” 16 May 2003, *Fresno Bee*: B1; Nicole Gaouette and Jerry Hirsch, “Proposed Farm Bill May Benefit California,” 1 February 2007, *Los Angeles Times*: C1; “A Warming World,” 17 September 2007, *Los Angeles Times*: A14; *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2005): 106–107.
- 8 “Official Biography of Dennis A. Cardoza,” <http://cardoza.house.gov/biography/> (accessed 29 May 2012).
- 9 As quoted in “Official Biography of Dennis A. Cardoza,” <http://cardoza.house.gov/biography/> (accessed 29 May 2012); *Politics in America, 2008*: 106.
- 10 *Politics in America, 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2009): 190.
- 11 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774 to Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; Kyle Trygstad, “Dennis Cardoza Makes Retirement Official,” 20 October 2011, *Roll Call*: n.p.; Seung Min Kim, “Dennis Cardoza’s Surprise Resignation,” 14 August 2012, *Politico*: n.p.



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THE RIGHT THING.”

Dennis A. Cardoza,
on being a Member of Congress
Fresno Bee, November 9, 2002