



Image courtesy of the Member

Devin Nunes

1973–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2003–
REPUBLICAN FROM CALIFORNIA

In 2002 Devin Nunes told a group of high school students, “All I wanted to be was a dairy farmer.”¹ Later that fall, however, he won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from California’s 21st District, starting a career that has made him a powerful figure in the national legislature.

The first of two sons, Devin Nunes was born in Tulare, California, on October 1, 1973, to Anthony and Diane Nunes, second-generation Portuguese-American dairy farmers in California’s Central Valley.² He grew up working the family farm and graduated from Tulare Union High School. He then earned an associate’s degree from the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California. In 1995 he graduated from California Polytechnic with a bachelor’s of science degree in agricultural business. The next year he completed a master’s of science degree in agriculture.³ After school Nunes returned to farming. He is married to Elizabeth Tamariz; together they have three daughters: Evelyn, Julia, and Margaret.⁴

Nunes’s first political victory occurred almost by accident. In 1996 after a candidate vying for a seat on the board of the College of the Sequoias backed out, Nunes, then only 22 years old, decided to run at the last minute and won. In 1998 he set his sights on Washington and ran as a Republican for California’s 20th District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He lost that year in the primary election, but in 2001 Nunes was appointed the California Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.⁵

Redistricting by the California assembly following the 2000 Census created an open district encompassing Nunes’s hometown in the San Joaquin Valley.⁶ The new 21st District is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country and is solidly Republican. Because of his previous tenure in public office, Nunes entered the GOP primary with an early advantage over his opponents. On the campaign trail, he made water use and access his foremost priority, with trade, job creation, and health care running close behind. He won the primary before crushing his Democratic opponent in the general election.⁷ “I’m most proud of growing up in a country where a son of recent immigrants can actually be elected to the United States Congress,” he said shortly after being sworn in as the second-youngest Member of the House at the time.⁸ Since 2002, Nunes has won by lopsided margins in general elections.

Nunes has sat on varied and powerful committees: Agriculture (108th–109th Congresses, 2003–2007); Resources (108th–109th Congresses, 2003–2007);

Veterans' Affairs (briefly in the 109th Congress, 2005–2007); Budget (111th Congress, 2009–2011); Ways and Means (109th–112th Congresses, 2005–2013); and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (112th Congress, 2011–2013).⁹ With large swaths of federal parkland surrounding his district, Nunes was appointed chairman of the Resources Committee's Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands in his sophomore term.¹⁰

Managing California's water supply, which Nunes once called "the most important issue facing the Valley and the state," has been at the forefront of his agenda.¹¹ He has sought funding for studies and dam projects along the San Joaquin River and has worked to bolster state and federal programs that manage California's water resources. He has fought to assist the dairy industry in his home district, supported timber harvesting in nearby national parks to prevent wildfires, and spearheaded efforts to fund programs working to curb drug trafficking in central California.¹² Trade and transportation have also been key considerations during Nunes's career, and he has worked to improve the condition of Highway 99, his district's major thoroughfare.¹³

Nunes has quietly emerged as one of the more influential members of his party. Republican leadership appointed him assistant Majority Whip during his first term, and he has positions on influential committees and caucuses, including his current appointment as vice chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee. He is also a member of the Congressional Hispanic Conference.¹⁴

FOR FURTHER READING

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NOTES

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- Lewis Griswold, "Nunes Pops Question; She Says Yes," 2 July 2003, *Fresno Bee*: B1; *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2005): 112; Marty Burleson, "Rep. Devin Nunes and Wife Get an Election Day Delivery—a Baby Girl!," 4 November 2009, *Tulare Advance-Register*: A1.
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- Kerri Ginis, "Hearing to Study Valley Water Needs," 26 June 2003, *Fresno Bee*: B1; Laura Florez, "Farmers: Build Another Dam," 30 June 2003, *Tulare Advance-Register*: A1; *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2007): 112; Michael Doyle, "Congress to Look at Sierra Drug Role," 8 October 2003, *Fresno Bee*: B1; Michael Doyle, "White House Helps Valley's Drug Battle," 25 August 2006, *Fresno Bee*: B4.
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