

Republican one by 14 points.

Debra Lucero, a Butte County supervisor who campaigned with Denney in 2018, acknowledged that running as a Democrat in a conservative-leaning district is tough, but she's cautiously optimistic that Denney's work could pay off this time.

"It's kind of like tilling ground, and she's been tilling some really hard earth," said Lucero. "Hopefully the seeds she's been planting will begin to grow."

Time for a change?

Placed against the backdrop of D.C. partisanship, Denney plainly stands out with a smart and intuitive communication style.

"She is open, she is transparent, [and] I think she's not jaded like a lot of us can be," Lucero said. "It's a breath of fresh air."

If she wins in November, Denney's chief cause would be to address the destructive fires that have ravaged the North State in recent years. She knows she'll need to galvanize support.

"I'm going to roll in there, I'm going to be the freshman rep from California's First District and what political power am I going to have? None," she said. "But what we're going to do is create allyships with other districts that have large swaths of natural resources, other mountainous districts in California, or in Forest Service District 5, which we are in. We [need to] take every possible step we can to increase the pace and the scale of this restoration work."

A key difference between how she and LaMalfa see the wildfire issue is that, in addition to recognizing a need for improving forest management and PG&E's poor infrastructure, Denney follows the science of climate change being a key driver in the growing intensity of wildfires.

"Obviously, wildfires are getting worse and worse, more frequent, more deadly, and hotter and hotter," Denney said. "For me, besides Congressman Doug LaMalfa, it is hard to find someone who just believes climate change is a hoax. ... Even in the ag industry, we're being hit so hard across the country, and people are like, 'It wasn't like this 10 years ago. It wasn't like this 30 years ago.'"

Denney already has some valuable experience under her belt. Post-Camp Fire, she went to work advocating for the county, at one point traveling to Washington D.C. with a group of people impacted by the disaster and meeting with 20 members of the House and Senate.

Brian Solicki, Denney's campaign manager who was on the trip, said, "We spent two days lobbying for increased FEMA funding," as well as discussing forest health and management and the influence of climate change on wildfires.

During the trip, Denney says, she realized that she had the skills and demeanor to do the work of a high-level public servant. In the office of John Garamendi (of California's Third District), Denney was left to lead a meeting with the congressman's staff. Afterward, Solicki said an energized Denney turned to him and said something to the effect of, "We could do this and we could do this well."

"That was a really transformational trip," Denney told the CN&R, adding that "getting to be involved at a community level" inspired her.

When asked how she might overcome Washington's combative culture, Denney said it comes down to making an effort to listen.

"You can put any single person in front of me and I'll connect with them, because I'll shut up, and ask questions," she said. "That's the secret to life: Being curious about other people and what they care about."

To illustrate the point she told a story from her 2018 campaign. Sitting alone at her table during a street fair in Etna, Denney was approached by a Vietnam veteran.

"This old man comes walking up to me—he looks just like my dad—and he's like, 'Are you a Republican or a Democrat?' 'I'm a Democrat.' And he goes off and does his little tirade, and I'm just smiling and nodding, and then I'm like, 'So, tell me about you.' We have this whole 20-minute conversation and he ends up giving me a hug and giving me 20 bucks."

"That's what happens when you show people you care about them." □

Her explanation for the change reflected in the poll is that "people in our part of the world are sick and tired of the status quo, ... sick and tired of a representative who's bought and paid for by his corporate interests."

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