

Sanders goes to Washington — again

Sweetser considers run in '98

By Adam Lisberg

Free Press Staff Writer

From the beginning they had fire in their voices, Washington in their eyes and a bitter divide between them. In the end, it wasn't even close.

U.S. Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt. won an easy 22-point victory Tuesday over Republican challenger Susan Sweetser, despite the tough battle both had fought all year long. The vote sends Sanders back to Congress for his fourth term as Vermont's only representative and the only one not affiliated with either major party.

"The fight that I've been waging continues," Sanders said Tuesday night, vowing to protect children, the elderly and the poor. "Not everybody in the state of Vermont who votes for me believes in everything I stand for. I know that. I think people understand that I've been consistent in what I've been fighting for."

Sweetser, meanwhile, licked her wounds and wouldn't rule

US House

■ Sanders leads a victory parade for Vt. incumbents, 5A

out another run in 1998.

"It was well worth it. I don't regret it," said Sweetser. "It looks like it's not a very good year for Republicans in general in Vermont."

With 67 percent of the vote counted early today, Sanders had 55 percent of the vote to 33 percent for Sweetser. Democrat Jack Long was a distant third, with 9 percent of the vote. The vote count was Sanders, 82,105; Sweetser, 48,167; Long, 13,787.

Sweetser conceded the race at a South Burlington hotel shortly after 10 p.m., holding her baby in her arms while she thanked her family and supporters. Later, she said it would have been tough for any Republican to beat Sanders this year.

"The polls really hadn't changed much in two months," she said. "I don't think that I could have changed the results enough."



GLENN RUSSELL, Free Press

Congressman Bernard Sanders greets supporters upon entering Mona's restaurant in Burlington on Tuesday night. Sanders beat back a challenge from GOP candidate Susan Sweetser.

While Sweetser was conceding, Sanders claimed victory in front of a cheering crowd at a restaurant on Burlington's waterfront. He was at a loss to explain why his margin of victory was so large.

"I thought we had a good

See SANDERS, 5A

SANDERS: Independent wins re-election

U.S. HOUSE

Continued from Page 1A

chance to win," he said, "but if you had asked me yesterday, I would not have thought it would have been by this much."

Long showed up at both candidates' parties to congratulate them and wish them well.

The two leading candidates couldn't have been more different. He is a three-term congressman with a thatch of uncombed white hair who said congressional Republicans were working only for the rich and powerful. She is a state senator from Chittenden County who embarked on her first statewide campaign with a baby in tow and a Republican message of balanced budgets and low taxes.

They offered two starkly contrasting visions of how America

should be run. Sanders attacked Sweetser as a tool of the Republican right wing, putting her on the defensive early. She said repeatedly that she was a moderate who would vote according to her conscience, not her party.

Her efforts were undercut when House Majority Leader Dick Armey and national GOP chairman Haley Barbour came to Vermont to raise money for her. Sanders seized on those visits as evidence that Sweetser would support a hard-right agenda.

The political landscape became more complicated in June when Long, a Burlington attorney who had never held elected office

before, entered the race as a Democrat. His only motivation, he said, was to provide a moderate alternative to Sanders on the left and Sweetser on the right.

Long had hoped to win funding and support from the national Democratic Party but was quickly rebuffed.

Though Long treated the campaign seriously, studying the issues and participating in debates, polls showed few voters made him their first choice. Long raised very little money — \$8,300 as of mid-October — which kept him off television except for one bare-bones commercial.

Sanders and Sweetser together raised almost \$1.4 million.

By mid-October, Sanders had raised \$913,000 and Sweetser had raised \$456,000, not including

another \$133,000 in spending from the national GOP and advertising support from a coalition of business groups.

By the final month of the campaign, those donations were paying for a blitz of television ads that bombarded viewers.

The most contentious issue to emerge from the advertising battle was a disputed statistic Sweetser used to claim that the average Vermonter saw a \$1,000 tax increase because of Sanders' vote for President Clinton's 1993 budget. Sanders angrily said the income tax increase affected only the top 1.2 percent of taxpayers, but that Sweetser's statistic implied that all taxpayers saw an increase. Despite strong criticism, Sweetser stood by the figure and the commercials.