

Over 100 candidates certified for California recall ballot

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More than 100 candidates were certified by Sunday afternoon for ballot status in the California gubernatorial recall election set for October 7. State election workers were continuing to check petition signatures and nomination forms for as many as 80 additional candidates who filed by the deadline of 5 p.m., August 9.

John Christopher Burton, the civil rights attorney whose independent campaign is supported by the Socialist Equality Party, was among the candidates whose filing documents were still under review Sunday afternoon, according to the latest posting on the web site of the California Secretary of State. [To view, visit http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/candidate_status_report_detail.pdf]

Burton is calling for a “no” vote on the recall of Governor Gray Davis, the first ballot item to be decided on October 7. At the same time, he is lending no support to the policies of Davis or the Democratic Party, and making use of the second ballot question—who is to replace Davis should the recall succeed—to present to the working people of California an alternative program to the pro-big business policies of both the Democrats and the Republicans.

National and state media attention has been largely focused on the candidacy of actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who announced he was entering the race as a Republican during an appearance on the “Tonight Show with Jay Leno” on Wednesday, August 6. The actor’s declaration triggered a series of decisions by a half dozen other veteran Democratic and Republican politicians.

Until Schwarzenegger’s entry, the official Democratic Party position was to focus its efforts on defeating the recall. Governor Davis was forced into the recall vote by a petition campaign financed by far-

right Republican congressman Darrell Issa, the multimillionaire proprietor of a car alarm company.

Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante became the first leading Democrat to break ranks. Within hours of Schwarzenegger’s announcement, Bustamante declared that while supporting a “no” vote on recalling Davis, he would have his name placed on the ballot list of candidates running to replace Davis. He was followed by a second Democratic officeholder, State Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi, but Garamendi reversed himself and withdrew Saturday, after extensive pressure from other Democratic officials.

On the Republican side, Issa withdrew his name from the ballot at a press conference where he broke down crying. The congressman from the coastal area near the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base, who is of Lebanese descent, improbably attributed his pullout to a desire to work for peace in the Middle East. He threw his support to Schwarzenegger.

Several other right-wing Republicans remain in the race, including State Senator Thomas McClintock and multimillionaire investor William E. Simon, the Republican candidate whom Gray Davis defeated only nine months ago. Another Republican millionaire, former baseball commissioner and Olympics committee chairman Peter Ueberroth, added his name.

There was a clamor of opposition to Schwarzenegger’s campaign from far-right elements in the Republican Party, particularly among Christian fundamentalists and radio talk show hosts. Rush Limbaugh criticized the actor as insufficiently conservative, while Rev. Lou Sheldon of the Family Values Coalition denounced Schwarzenegger’s support for abortion rights and gay marriage.

The Republican Party establishment, however, generally rallied to Schwarzenegger’s campaign.

Former California Governor Pete Wilson is serving as his campaign co-chairman and many congressmen and state legislators immediately endorsed him.

President Bush made a brief appearance before the media while on vacation at his Texas ranch in order to make an obviously rehearsed “off the cuff” remark suggesting that Schwarzenegger would make a fine governor.

Besides the hysteria over Schwarzenegger—both *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* made him their cover story—the media is treating only six other candidates, out of the 180 who filed to run, as “serious”: Bustamante, Simon, McClintock, Ueberroth, columnist Ariana Huffington and Peter Miguel Camejo, the Green Party candidate who received 5 percent of the vote last November.

There are, in addition, a dozen candidates associated with other political parties, including, besides the Socialist Equality Party, several Greens, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Natural Law Party, the Reform Party, the Libertarian Party, and the American Independent Party.

The comparatively easy access to the ballot, with 65 supporting signatures required for nomination—compared to hundreds of thousands of signatures for the California statewide ballot in 2002—encouraged an outpouring of political activity last week.

The vast majority of the 180 who filed as candidates are ordinary working and middle-class people who paid the \$3,500 filing fee—a considerable sum for most of them—because they wanted to be heard. Whatever their political confusion, they appear for the most part to be motivated by concern over the massive state budget deficit, the deepening economic and social crisis, and the decay and corruption of the political system.

Those who filed include teachers, computer programmers, nurses, engineers, students, attorneys, artists, managers, a railway worker and various small businessmen. About a third filed as Democrats, a third as Republicans and a third as nonpartisan. At least a half dozen of the Democrats declared in their filing statements that they were running as a protest against the recall campaign, which they regard as a violation of democracy since Davis was elected only nine months ago.

There are also individuals campaigning on a number

of specific political issues, ranging from opposition to capital punishment to support for marijuana legalization to the prohibition of further immigration.

The reaction of the state and national media has been to deride the proliferation of candidates filing for the governor’s race, portraying them as kooks and publicity-seekers. The media has focused its attention on a handful of pornographers, unemployed actors, business promoters and comedians who are seeking to advance their careers with a bit of notoriety. These make up only a small fraction of those who filed for the October 7 ballot.

This grossly dishonest portrayal underscores the antidemocratic bias of the corporate-controlled media. When a right-wing multimillionaire uses his fortune to subvert democracy, pumping in over \$2 million to hire paid signature-gatherers for the campaign to recall a governor elected less than a year ago, the media treats this as an exercise in grassroots activism.

But when hundreds of people, normally excluded from political life by huge financial barriers and the monopoly control of the two big business parties, exercise their democratic right to run for office, the media treats them as interlopers who have no business interfering in the political life of the state in which they live.



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