

Right-wing initiatives dominate California special election

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When California voters go to the polls November 8 for the state's special election, they will be confronted with a series of right-wing measures. The majority of the eight initiatives on the ballot are aimed at further eroding the living standards and democratic rights of working people. None of the initiatives that voters will be asked to decide on express the concerns and needs of ordinary people in California.

Four of the eight initiatives to be voted on are endorsed by Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. These include the Teacher Tenure Initiative (Proposition 74), the Union Paycheck Initiative (Proposition 75), the State Spending Cap Initiative (Proposition 76), and the Redistricting Initiative (Proposition 77). All of these so-called "reforms" represent an attack on the economic and political interests of the working class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* on November 2 published a statement calling for a "no" vote on Proposition 75, which can be found online.

In addition to the Union Paycheck Initiative, Proposition 76 is one of the most critical initiatives for the Republican right. The State Spending Cap Initiative would limit budget expenditures to the prior year's outlays, plus the three previous years' average annual growth. Even during years in which there is an economic upswing leading to higher tax revenues, state expenditures would be extremely restricted.

The initiative would also eliminate minimum K-12 school funding requirements, which are currently set at 40 percent of the state budget. Most importantly, Proposition 76 would give the governor extraordinary powers to impose mid-year budget cuts if there is an unexpected fall-off in state revenues. This anti-democratic provision would greatly enhance the power of the executive branch at the expense of the

legislature, making it easier to attack what remains of the social safety net in California.

In order to make the Democratic-dominated political map of the state more favorable to Republican candidates, Schwarzenegger is pushing for the passage of Proposition 77. The Redistricting Initiative would transfer the drawing of state legislative and congressional districts from the State Assembly to a panel of retired federal judges appointed by the State Assembly.

The purpose of this measure is to break up the current gerrymandered system that has made most incumbent seats difficult to challenge. Despite being named by Schwarzenegger the Voter Empowerment Act, Proposition 77 has nothing to do with empowering voters. It is aimed at making it easier for the Republican right to gain political representation far out of proportion to its actual level of support within the population.

As a recent editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* by election watchdog Jamie Court noted, "Some of the nation's leading conservative thinkers and strategists are seeking, through Schwarzenegger's initiatives, to alter the balance of power between the right and left wings of California politics. Their hope is to turn California red in '08 and pioneer a new gospel that can spread across the country."

The final initiative backed by Schwarzenegger is the Teacher Tenure Initiative. Proposition 74 would extend the time that it takes teachers in California's public schools to achieve tenure from two to five years and make it easier for so-called "under-performing" teachers to be dismissed. The initiative is an attack on the job security of educators and an attempt to bring a form of merit pay into the school system.

Schwarzenegger's claim that he is backing

Proposition 74 to defend the interests of California's school children is a lie. In this year's budget, Schwarzenegger refused to restore \$2 billion worth of legally mandated funding for K-12 education. He was able to do so because the Democratic-controlled legislature, with the support of the California Teachers Association, acceded to his demand that the money not be appropriated.

Recent polls of likely voters have shown growing opposition to many of the measures on the ballot. The *Los Angeles Times* reported November 2 that 60 percent of those expected to go to the polls next Tuesday oppose the Spending Cap Initiative, 56 percent oppose the Redistricting Initiative, and 51 percent oppose the Union Paycheck Initiative. Voters appear split on the Teacher Tenure Initiative, with 45 percent saying they would vote "yes" compared to 47 percent who would vote "no."

In recent weeks Schwarzenegger pulled television ads in which he advocates a "yes" vote for propositions 74 thru 77 because they were having a negative effect on public support for the measures.

The Christian right in California is behind an initiative known as Proposition 73. If passed, it would amend the California constitution to prevent a minor from getting an abortion until 48 hours after a physician notified her parents or legal guardians. Most importantly, the proposition would define abortion as the "death of the unborn child, a child conceived but not yet born." This definition is designed to pave the way for a more widespread assault on abortion rights.

The far-right is using Proposition 73 to appeal to its constituents to turn out en masse on November 8 in an effort to rally conservative voters in a last ditch attempt to secure the passage of propositions 74 thru 77.

Of all the propositions in the special election, none is receiving more financial support than Proposition 78. This measure, which would create voluntary programs to provide reduced-cost drugs to low and moderate-income individuals, is backed by \$80 million in funding from the pharmaceutical industry.

Proposition 78 is the alternative being backed by the drug companies to Proposition 79, which would require drug companies whose medicines are prescribed through Medi-Cal, the state medical program for low-income individuals, to participate in a mandatory prescription drug discount program. Field polls

conducted in September found that when respondents were informed Proposition 78 was backed by the pharmaceutical industry, they overwhelmingly indicated they would vote against it.

Through the Alliance for a Better California (ABC), the Democrats and the trade unions are calling on voters to oppose Proposition 78 and vote "yes" on Proposition 79. However, Proposition 79 will do little to address the need of working and middle class Californians for low-cost prescription drugs, much less low-cost health care in general.

For the forces behind the ABC to portray themselves as the genuine defenders of working people against the pharmaceutical and health care industry is a farce. The Democrats have worked hand-in-hand with the Republicans to gut the public health infrastructure in California, including the implementation of cuts and restrictions in programs like Medi-Cal.

The last initiative on the November 8 ballot is Proposition 80, a measure that would reinstitute a degree of public regulation of the energy industry by returning control and oversight of electric service providers to the California Public Utilities Commission.

Experts have predicted that upwards of \$200 million will be spent by the various sides campaigning for and against the different initiatives in the Special Election. This staggering sum is an expression of the degree to which corporate finance dominates the political process in California.



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