

California Republicans claim 1.7 million signatures on petition to recall Democratic Governor Newsom

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The petition drive against California Governor Gavin Newsom, organized on a right-wing basis by the state Republican Party, is on track to reach the 1.5 million signature threshold required to force a recall election later this year.

The recall organizers claim to have collected 1.7 million signatures as of February 17. The California Secretary of State's office has validated 668,000 of those signatures thus far, and must have the full 1.5 million validated by March 17 to proceed with the recall election.

The campaign, which seemed destined to fizzle like previous earlier efforts, was given a new lease on life in November when a state superior court judge provided the campaign with an additional four months to meet its signature requirement due to public gathering restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By contrast, the Socialist Equality Party's 2020 presidential campaign was granted no such leeway when its lawyers in California argued its signature requirement was impossible to meet "in light of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic and the state's countermeasures to it."

The recall drive is a thoroughly right-wing operation. Its organizers denounce Newsom, a Democrat, not for prematurely reopening businesses and schools and forcing educators and other workers back into unsafe workplaces in the midst of a deadly pandemic, but for imposing any restrictions at all that might limit corporate profits. This is combined with anti-immigrant racism and defense of police brutality.

The recall petition itself spells out these aims. It argues: "Laws he [Newsom] endorsed favor foreign nationals, in our country illegally, over that of our own citizens." It continues: "He has imposed sanctuary state status and fails to enforce immigration laws. He unilaterally over-ruled the will of the people regarding the death penalty."

Recall Gavin 2020, one of the two organizations behind the effort, writes on its website "Are you troubled by the growing encroachments on the 1st Amendment; our right to speak our minds, to freely assemble, to congregate whether it's at church or on the beach? Then join the Recall Gavin 2020 movement."

The other group behind the recall is known as "Rescue California." They mention Newsom's "dictatorial on-again, off-again shutdown orders" on their website as the reason behind their cause.

The recall drive itself has its origins in ultra-right and fascistic militia groups like those which spearheaded the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, even if it has tried to cultivate a more respectable image since.

A *Newsweek* report published on January 28 found that the groups initially involved in pushing the recall included the Oath Keepers, the III Percenters and the Proud Boys. One such figure involved is Proud Boys member and recently-elected Sacramento County Republican Party's Central Committee member Jeffery Perrine, who was documented on social media demanding that "illegal immigrants should have their heads smashed into the concrete."

Another, whose name appears on the recall petition among the 10 initial recall proponents is Daniel Seoane. On the main recall website, a biography for Seoane is left blank. However, the *Newsweek* report found that Seoane is a member of the III Percenters and was highlighted in one of the group's newsletters in an earlier attempt to recall the governor.

About \$2.4 million dollars have been received from various sources to pay signature collectors and the recall organizers are hoping to gather several hundred thousand more in the next three weeks to withstand possible challenges from the secretary's office.

At least \$150,000 from the state Republican Party and \$250,000 from the national Republican Party have been donated to the recall organizers.

Prominent Republican figures such as former House speaker Newt Gingrich and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee have spoken out in favor of removing Newsom. Huckabee recently tweeted to his followers, "Governor Newsom's shutdowns hold families hostage. It's time to go @GavinNewsom"

Most additional funding came from large-dollar individual donations. The largest, \$500,000, came from John Kruger, who runs an organization known as Prov 3:9 LLC. Kruger is a retired multi-millionaire investor, who, in his own words, works "full-time to bring school choice to California, and fiscal reform, including religious school choice."

Proverbs 3:9 is a bible verse that tells the wealthy to use their riches to honor god, promising them even greater riches in return. It demonstrates the Christian fundamentalist basis of this right-wing political operation.

Various Silicon Valley executives and venture capitalists have

also supported the effort. Many are upset with what they deem to be Newsom's slow pace of economic reopening.

Billionaire venture capitalist Doug Leone contributed \$100,000 while the family of venture capitalist Dixon Dell also donated \$100,000. Former PayPal executive David Sacks also supports the recall with multiple donations to the campaign. He tweeted, "California is being eaten alive right now by D.A's who won't prosecute, teachers unions who won't teach, and politicians who won't stand up to special interests."

Two Republicans have formally launched campaigns to replace Newsom: former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and 2018 gubernatorial candidate John Cox. Cox was Newsom's opponent in the 2018 election and has donated \$50,000 of his own to the recall effort. An anti-abortion candidate, Cox previously stated, "There is no separation of church and state in the Constitution."

Richard Grenell, Trump's former acting intelligence chief, has worked with recall organizers and is also expected to announce his candidacy. While Trump has not yet publicly weighed in on the recall, it is expected that he would support Grenell should the recall vote actually proceed.

There is precedent for this operation. In 2003, similar right-wing forces succeeded in forcing a recall election for Democratic Governor Gray Davis, only nine months after he had easily won reelection. Davis was recalled and Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger won the contest to replace him. In 2021, however, the political circumstances are somewhat different. Newsom was first elected in 2018 and is up for re-election in 2022. None of the Republicans seeking to replace him have the celebrity or financial backing of Schwarzenegger.

In 2003, there was a significant split among Democrats, as several entered the contest to replace Davis, including his own lieutenant governor, Cruz Bustamante, who finished second to Schwarzenegger with 31.5 percent of the vote. In 2021, no Democrat has yet entered the recall election, with the party concentrating on defending Newsom. The governor has also received support from the president after White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters the Biden administration was "closely engaged with [Newsom] and his office" in opposing the recall drive.

While defending Newsom as an officeholder, the Democrats have made clear they have no intention of opposing the actual politics of the recall movement.

Less than a week after Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol to violently prevent the certification of Joe Biden as president, California Democratic Party Chair Rusty Hicks referred to the campaign as a coup associated with far-right conspiracy theorists. "This recall effort, which really ought to be called the California coup, is being led by right-wing conspiracy theorists, white nationalists, anti-vaxxers in groups who encourage violence in our democratic institutions."

Exemplifying the complete spinelessness of the Democrats in the face of right-wing and fascistic provocations, Hicks quickly retracted his comments. "My calling the recall a 'coup' has become a distraction from an incredibly important conversation," he wrote. "The words we use matter."

One is compelled to ask, how could it be that less than three

years after the Democratic governor defeated his opponent in a lopsided contest by 62 percent to 38 percent and in which three months ago, Donald Trump lost to Joe Biden by an even larger percentage, by a statewide margin of more than 5 million votes, the sitting Democratic governor faces the prospect of losing office?

This turn of events only underscores that the Democrats offer no real progressive alternative to Trump and the Republicans as events during Newsom's tenure have amply demonstrated.

Under Newsom's leadership, the state has been plagued by its disastrous response to the coronavirus pandemic, a botched and inadequate roll-out of vaccines as well as delayed and cancelled unemployment checks for jobless Californians.

The governor recently announced that schools were safe for in-person learning and should be reopened as soon as possible, spurning the tens of thousands of teachers who are opposed to reopening schools in the midst of a deadly pandemic. He pledged \$2 billion in state funding for schools to reopen and began lifting any and all stay at home orders while the coronavirus burned through the state's population.

Beginning with open flouting of state lockdown measures by Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Newsom and the state government have allowed industries and businesses such as Tesla, Amazon and Tyson Foods to keep workers on the job indoors with little to no protections, leading to massive increases in coronavirus infections and deaths. Newsom has also done nothing to hold utility companies responsible for the wildfires they caused leading to hundreds of homes destroyed and dozens of lives lost.

These and other such failings have led to a massive decline in public support for the governor which the recall organizers were able to seize upon. According to a poll from the Public Policy Institute of California, support for Newsom declined from 66 percent in September to only 46 percent today.

The recall effort, however, is a right-wing power grab employing fake populism to obscure a thoroughly reactionary anti-working-class agenda. Workers should oppose the petition and its goal of replacing Newsom with an even more reactionary state executive who will dismantle all coronavirus restrictions. At the same time, workers should give no political support to Newsom, who acts on behalf of the White House and Wall Street in pushing for a full economic reopening regardless of the cost in suffering and death for the working class.



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