

California Governor Newsom faces right-wing recall

Rafael Azul
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Organizers of the campaign to recall California Governor Gavin Newsom handed in more than 2 million signatures by the March 17 deadline; this figure is significantly higher than the 1.5 million signatures needed to trigger the recall. Given preliminary estimates indicate an 80 percent validation rate, there is a high probability that a recall vote will take place this October or November, a year before the governor finishes his first term.

In expectation that the recall petition will meet the requirement and force a vote, the California Democratic Party has launched an anti-recall website, StopTheRepublicanRecall.com.

There is nothing progressive about the drive to unseat California governor Gavin Newsom—StopTheRepublicanRecall.com correctly points out that it is being organized by a collection of right-wing, evangelical, ultra-nationalist, xenophobic and fascist groups and individuals.

It appeals to some of those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, but principally small businessmen and others whose economic interests have been hurt by lockdowns, not to those suffering from the health effects of the pandemic and the current drive, spearheaded by Newsom, to reopen schools and businesses no matter what the cost is in terms of lives.

The Newsom administration in California, like the Biden administration, places corporate profits ahead of the health needs of working class families and the poor. As of last Sunday, California had reported 3,613,780 infections and 56,833 deaths. Only 11.7 percent of the state's population has been vaccinated. Despite this horrible toll, schools are being reopened and lockdown measures significantly eased.

Like President Biden, Newsom is faithful to the needs of the financial oligarchy and supports its policy of herd immunity during the COVID-19 pandemic. By aggressively pushing for the reopening of the state's economy and of public schools, the governor is turning his back on science and endangering California families.

However, the recall campaign is not because Newsom's policies endanger Californians, or for his attacks on the working class, but because, in the view of its ultra-right supporters, Newsom has been too slow in these attacks.

The words of the petition outline a rabid attack on democratic rights and working class families, and a free-market defense of big business:

Governor Newsom has implemented laws which are detrimental to the people of this state and our way of life. Laws he endorsed favor foreign nationals in our country illegally, over that of our own citizens. People in this state suffer from the highest taxes in the nation, the highest homelessness rates, and the lowest quality of life as a result. 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. He seeks to impose additional burdens on our state by the following: removing the protections of Proposition 13 [limiting the state's ability to raise property taxes], rationing our water use, increasing taxes and restricting parental rights.

Additionally, the campaign website recallgavin2020.com blames the governor for emptying prisons, locking down the population and for other grievances associated with right-wing, ultra-nationalist and fascist organizations such as QAnon, the John Birch Society, the California Patriot Commission, Christian fundamentalists and the anti-immigrant movement.

Their issues include support for treating workers as "independent contractors," opposition to sex education in schools, opposition to supportive housing and benefits for the homeless and immigrants, opposition to increases in the minimum wage, opposition to COVID-19 restrictions of church services, and—in addition to calls for the reopening of public schools and colleges—support for the death penalty, for the police, and for the unrestricted right to carry weapons.

Last week, an opinion poll released by Nexstar Media found that 38 percent of those surveyed would vote to recall the governor, 42 percent would vote against, 13.9 percent have not decided and the rest would not vote. A February poll by the Institute of Governmental Studies of the University of California found that just 36 percent of California voters were in favor of the recall.

Orrin Heatlie, a retired Yolo County sheriff's sergeant and leader of the recall campaign, declared that "the people of California are speaking loud and clear. We have cleared another milestone," when he announced that his group's 2 million signature goal had been reached. He lives in Folsom, California, outside Sacramento, site of the infamous state prison.

Heatlie is notorious for calling for installing microchips in undocumented immigrants so the government could monitor their

movements. He wrote in 2019, “Microchip all illegal immigrants. It works! Just ask Animal control!”

The recall campaign began in June 2020. Legally, the petitioners had 160 days to collect the required number of signatures, until mid-November. Anticipating that they would not have enough signatures by that deadline, Heatlie and his California Patriot Coalition appealed in October to a Sacramento court, asking for more time, arguing that the restrictions imposed by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic “severely inhibited” their ability to circulate petitions and gather signatures in support of the recall effort.

Sacramento Judge James Arguelles agreed with the recall campaign, declaring their argument “persuasive”. The ruling was made final on October 16, 2020, when California Secretary of State Alex Padilla did not present any arguments challenging the group’s request.

The attitude of the Democrats and the courts was far different when they considered the request of the Socialist Equality Party 2020 campaign, when attorneys for Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz, the party’s candidates, asked for the signature requirements to be suspended because the COVID-19 pandemic made it too dangerous to approach voters.

Democrats vociferously opposed the SEP effort, claiming that putting the SEP on the ballot “would cause voter confusion and frustration of the democratic process.” Attorneys representing Governor Newsom and Secretary of State Padilla argued that the SEP should have deployed “66 signature gatherers, working five days a week for 15 weeks, to obtain the requisite number of signatures.” This in the midst of a global pandemic, when social distancing rules effectively barred the type of contact required to collect signatures.

However, confronted by a right-wing petition, backed by sections of the Republican Party, both Padilla and the courts were happy to oblige, granting an additional four months to collect signatures. The court’s decision gave new impetus to Recallgavin2020. Donations increased, paid petitioners were hired. As of February 2021, the campaign had raised over \$2.5 million, with hundreds of out-of-state donors.

In Arkansas, former governor Mike Huckabee’s Political Action Committee donated \$100,000. Tens of thousands of dollars have come from Texas, Oklahoma, New York, and Florida. Last December in Orange County, California, a reactionary evangelical group known as Prov 3:9 donated \$500,000, from a donor who opposed the governor’s decision to close churches during the pandemic. (Prov 3:9 takes its name from a biblical text that admonishes rich people to use their riches to honor God, in return for more wealth for the super-rich).

The announcement that 2 million signatures had been obtained came the day after Newsom delivered his third “State of the State” speech in Los Angeles’ Dodger Stadium, in which he dismissed his critics as “a few nay-sayers and dooms-dayers” motivated by “outdated prejudices.” He pledged to his big-business backers, “we will not be distracted from getting shots in the arms and our economy booming again.”

In his speech, Newsom promised to fight for “equity” among Californians, a far cry from his actual record as the choice of the

multi-millionaires both to become mayor of San Francisco and then governor. He showed his devotion to “equity” with his October 2019 veto of a \$2 billion affordable housing bill to address the homelessness crisis in the state, financed by a tax on wealth.

With this veto Newsom exposed himself as a fiscal austerity conservative, no less than the Republicans. “The one thing that concerns me and should concern everybody is our ability to balance the books,” said Newsom as he killed the bill. More recently, Newsom has repeatedly blocked additional funds for schools.

By describing the recall campaign as the work of a “handful” of supporters of former President Trump attempting to “divide America,” Newsom has followed the script laid out by President Biden and the Democratic Party. He minimizes the significance of the recall drive, much as Biden has done with regard to the national Republican Party and the assault on Congress of January 6, 2021.

When California Democratic Party chair Rusty Hicks had observed that some of the groups and individuals who participated in the January 6 attack, are also part of the recall effort, he was compelled to back down from the comparison. But San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria agreed, declaring that it was possible to “draw a straight line from” the January 6 event to the recall effort.

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.”

Interviewed on *The View* television program on March 16, Newsom continued to downplay the recall drive, pointing out the small proportion of the electorate required for a recall to get to the ballot compared to other states and to the number of people who cast their ballots for Trump in California.



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