

The far-right candidates in the 2021 California recall election

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In two weeks, California residents will be casting ballots in the recall election against Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. The vote will be held on September 14.

It marks the second time in California history that an effort to recall a sitting governor has qualified for a general vote, the first being the successful election to recall Gray Davis, also a Democrat, in 2003. That vote placed Republican politician and movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger in power.

The Socialist Equality Party is calling for a “No” vote in the recall election, which has been organized by far-right forces opposed even to the limited patchwork of COVID-19 measures implemented by Newsom. While the SEP calls for a “No” vote, we give no political support to Newsom and the Democrats. We are running David Moore, the only genuine socialist on the ballot, to fight for an independent political movement of the working class against both big business parties and the capitalist system. More information about Moore’s campaign can be found [here](#).

As of August 31, the polling site FiveThirtyEight was predicting a close vote, with 51.0 percent voting to keep Newsom and 45.4 percent voting to remove him.

The ballot will have two questions: Whether to recall Newsom and, should a majority vote for his removal, who will replace him. Forty-six candidates are in the running, and it takes only a simple plurality to win, meaning a candidate could win with only minority support. Californians can vote on the second question even if they vote against recalling Newsom.

Who are the right-wing candidates running for governor in the recall?

Larry Elder

The leading figure, according to polls, among the 24 Republicans running for governor is Larry Elder. Elder is a far-right talk show host based in Los Angeles. He has been

working in television and radio as a host since at least the early 1990s. He hosted PBS’s *National Desk* in the 1990s, alongside Laura Ingraham, and has hosted a nationally syndicated talk show, “The Larry Elder Show” for decades.

Elder is running as a champion of the right-wing anti-vaccine movement. At an August 22 speech in Fresno he said that he would repeal all mask and vaccine mandates throughout the state “before I have my first cup of tea” as governor. Earlier this year, Elder hosted a physician who claimed COVID-19 vaccines were a conspiracy by Bill Gates to control the population.

Over the last 20 years, Elder has described second-hand tobacco smoke claims as exaggerated. He has called climate change a “myth” and a “crock” and recently denounced “climate change alarmism.” He describes himself as a libertarian and has expressed opposition to a minimum wage and the “welfare state,” and called for the mass firing of California teachers.

Elder has a very close relationship with Donald Trump’s fascistic adviser Stephen Miller. Miller began calling into Elder’s talk show as a high school student and has made appearances dozens of times on the show, according to *Los Angeles Times* journalist Jean Guerrero. Miller once said of Elder that he was “the one true guide I’ve always had,” and Elder has been described as Miller’s mentor. Miller, whose friends also include neo-Nazi Richard Spencer, played a key role in orchestrating Trump’s January 6 coup attempt.

Elder backs the Republican claims that Trump won the 2020 election. Recently, he stated, “Do I believe that Joe Biden won the 2020 election fair and square? No, I don’t.”

Elder has repeatedly supported the fraudulent claim that Dominion Voting Systems software manipulated votes in the 2020 presidential election, stating that he “wouldn’t put it past” the company to interfere in the California gubernatorial recall.

It is worth noting that Elder was originally not included on the ballot due to an error on his tax returns, but a sympathetic Sacramento judge ordered the California Secretary of State’s office to include him.

This is in glaring contrast to how the SEP's candidates in the 2020 presidential election were denied ballot access in California through the use of unfair and unreasonable signature requirements.

Elder, at 21.9 percent, is polling substantially higher than his two closest rival candidates, according to FiveThirtyEight's polling aggregator.

Other candidates

The next leading candidate in the polls is 29-year-old millionaire YouTube "influencer" Kevin Paffrath, who is running as a Democrat. Paffrath, according to FiveThirtyEight, is polling at 6.8 percent. He is opposing Newsom from the right. In a future article, the *World Socialist Web Site* will examine the Democratic candidates, including Paffrath.

After Larry Elder, there are several other candidates out of the 24 Republicans worth noting.

John Cox, a businessman and perennially unsuccessful candidate for office in California and Illinois, is polling at 5.2 percent, according to FiveThirtyEight. Like Elder, Cox calls for abolishing all vaccine mandates in the state. He stated in the first Republican debate in the recall campaign that he would cut spending by \$30 billion and lower income taxes by 25 percent.

Cox promotes anti-immigrant racism to demand a further militarization of the border, linking immigrants to drugs and human trafficking and scapegoating them for supposedly taking jobs from native-born Americans. He was endorsed by former President Trump, who described Cox as "a really good and highly competent man." In an attempt to gain attention, Cox has been campaigning with a live Kodiak bear.

Kevin Faulconer, former mayor of San Diego, is the Republican candidate with the most experience and endorsements, which evidently has redounded against his campaign. Like other Republican candidates, he promises "the largest middle class tax cut in CA history." He presents himself as pro-police, denouncing calls by a handful of Democrats—long since dropped—to "defund" the police.

While not openly endorsing the anti-vaccine movement, he has called for the ending of mask mandates in schools. As San Diego mayor, he carried out an aggressive crackdown on homeless people following an outbreak of Hepatitis A, which killed more than 20 people.

Caitlyn Jenner, the American media personality and retired athlete, is also running. Jenner, who is transgender, is most known for campaigning to prevent transgender women from competing in female sports. She has also played to the anti-vaccine movement, declaring that she was against mandates for vaccines for state employees and is for "individual freedom." A Trump supporter, Jenner told an audience

recently that she would "rip the roots of socialism out of Sacramento."

Other Republican candidates include State Assembly member Ted Gaines, State Assembly member Kevin Kiley and actress, anti-vaccine advocate and QAnon promoter Sarah Stephens.

Three of the Republican candidates participated in a recall debate on August 25 along with Democrat Paffrath.

Paffrath made clear his opposition to state-wide coronavirus mandates, saying it was up to individual buildings and workplaces. Echoing the opposition of the Republicans to any serious measures to contain the virus, he said, "I believe that every business has the constitutional right and every individual building has a right to determine their own mandates."

Newsom, for his part, fully supports the homicidal policy of the Biden administration to reopen the schools and businesses in the midst of the Delta-fueled surge in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. Whatever their differences, the Democrats and Republicans agree that the measures advocated by the foremost medical experts and epidemiologists to save lives and end the pandemic—including the shutdown of schools and all non-essential businesses—are ruled out because they would cut across the profit interests of the ruling corporate oligarchy.

David Moore, the socialist candidate, speaks for the working class and the vast majority of the population in calling for the use of all possible resources and scientific tools to save lives and eradicate the virus on the basis of a globally coordinated effort. This requires the mobilization of the working class in opposition to the capitalist class and its political parties and agents.



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