

Democrats flood California with campaign surrogates and cash to back Governor Gavin Newsom

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Shocked by polls that at one point suggested that California Governor Gavin Newsom could lose the recall election set for next Tuesday, September 14, the national Democratic Party has flooded the state with campaign surrogates, backed by a huge infusion of corporate cash, seeking to maintain its political control of the most populous US state.

The gubernatorial elections are dominated by the expanding pandemic. New cases in the state have risen to 15,000 a day, the highest level since the beginning of February. With the reopening of schools to in-person instruction, over 24,000 pediatric cases were recorded last week and hospitalizations are surging.

The recall campaign is being driven and financed by far-right forces opposed to the most minimal restraints on the spread of the pandemic. Newsom himself, however, has presided over the reopening of schools and businesses throughout the state, in line with the policy of the Democratic Party and the Biden administration.

Vice President Kamala Harris was the highest-ranking Democrat to stand side-by-side with Newsom, appearing Wednesday in the Bay Area suburb of San Leandro. Harris praised Newsom in extravagant terms, portraying the multimillionaire scion of the San Francisco moneyed elite as a friend of working people who “stands for workers’ rights.” The real content of this claim is that Newsom is a close ally of the union apparatus, a key instrument in suppressing opposition in the working class, particularly to the reopening of schools.

It was symbolic that the site chosen for the Harris–Newsom rally was the IBEW–NECA Joint Apprenticeship Training Center. The acronyms stand for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (the electricians union) and National Electrical Contractors Association (the employers lobby). Such labor–management “joint” facilities are conduits for the corporate payment of millions of dollars to corrupt union officials and the promotion of corporatist schemes against the working class.

Harris followed a group of prominent Democrats who campaigned with Newsom across southern California on the Labor Day weekend, including Senator Elizabeth Warren of

Massachusetts and Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. On Labor Day itself, Newsom appeared with Representative Karen Bass, the “left”-talking congresswoman from Los Angeles, at a center for black voters in Baldwin Hills.

Former president Barack Obama recently shot an ad defending Newsom’s pandemic policies, declaring that the outcome was a choice “between protecting our kids and putting them at risk”—even though it is Newsom himself that is overseeing the reopening of schools, which will guarantee the mass infection of children and teachers alike.

The most significant support for Newsom has come from Bernie Sanders. The senator from Vermont and former presidential candidate, who carried California convincingly in the presidential primary last year, defeating Joe Biden, appeared in a campaign ad urging a “no” vote on the recall of Newsom, which has been running virtually non-stop on California media for two weeks, with a particular focus on Latino voters.

Sanders has entirely buried his supposed differences with the Democratic Party leadership to play the role of Senate cheerleader for Biden’s legislative agenda, in his capacity as chairman of the Budget Committee. In electoral politics, even though he remains nominally an “independent,” he is rushing to the rescue of the California governor who is the epitome of the “corporate Democrats” whom Sanders regularly denounced in his two presidential campaigns.

The Democratic rescue operation for Newsom is to culminate in an appearance by President Biden, now expected to take place next Monday, on the eve of September 14, the final day for dropping off ballots in the election, which is being conducted entirely by mail.

Voters have only two choices to make on the ballot. The first question is whether Newsom should be removed from office. The second question is who should replace him, but that will be moot if the recall is defeated. Recent polls have shown the “no” vote ahead, by varying margins, meaning Newsom would remain in office, and show far-right African-American talk-show host Larry Elder leading in the replacement ballot, where there are 46 candidates to choose from, but no prominent

Democrats.

The Socialist Equality Party has called for a “no” vote on the recall, because it was engineered by ultra-right Republican groups who want to eliminate even the most minimal mitigation measures against the spread of the pandemic. The SEP is running educator David Moore for governor and urges a vote for him in the replacement vote. A vote for David Moore is a class-conscious vote for the independent political organization of the working class based on socialist principles.

More than 6 million ballots have been returned already, and registered Democrats account for a clear majority, well over 50 percent, while registered Republicans account for about 25 percent, and registered independents for the remainder. This is in line with the overall registration figures in the state, which the Democratic Party has dominated for the past two decades.

On the central issue in the campaign, the coronavirus pandemic, each candidate is aligned with his respective faction of the ruling elite. Elder is an open proponent of the policy carried out by Republican governors in Florida, Texas and other states, of dropping all restrictions and opposes mandates of both vaccines and mask wearing—“herd immunity” without any pretense of fighting the pandemic.

Newsom espouses the “mitigation” strategy of the Biden administration—full reopening of schools, with mandatory mask wearing and mandatory vaccination of teachers, limited restrictions on bars, restaurants and in-person services like barber shops, but no restrictions on the operations of giant corporations and agribusiness.

Both candidates, like the US ruling elite as a whole, dismiss any possibility of eliminating or eradicating COVID-19, which has already killed more than 67,000 people in California and infected 4.4 million, or one in every nine people in the state.

As the *New York Times* noted, in a remarkable admission, “From the start, Newsom decided to avoid making the race a referendum on his tenure.” In other words, the Democratic governor did not want an up-or-down vote on his record, which large numbers of Democratic voters condemn. Instead, he sought to intimidate them with the prospect of something even worse.

Elder has certainly obliged, providing an endless stream of ultra-right provocations. He has embraced Trump’s conspiracy theories about the 2020 elections being stolen, and embraced a litany of other ultra-right views, opposing abortion and sex education, and abolition of the minimum wage.

The emergence of Elder as the leading candidate to replace Newsom likely accounts for much of the apparent shift in popular sentiment against recalling the governor, who is widely despised as the epitome of ruling class arrogance and entitlement. The financial disparity between Newsom, who has raised \$60.5 million to fight the recall, and Elder, who has raised \$8.3 million, much of it from outside California, is also having an impact.

Unlike elections for public office, where contributions are

limited to \$32,500 to any one candidate, the recall is regulated like a referendum vote, so that under state law individuals and organizations can give unlimited amounts of money. More than \$50 million out of Newsom’s \$60 million haul has come in donations of more than \$100,000 from wealthy individuals, corporations and unions. The California Teachers Association, which alongside the national teachers unions has supported forcing students back into crowded classrooms, gave \$1.8 million, the second-largest donation to the “no” campaign.

The bulk of this corporate money comes from Silicon Valley and Hollywood, both mainstays of the Democratic Party. The biggest single donor is Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings, who has given \$3 million to the campaign for a “no” vote. Connie Ballmer, wife of former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, chipped in \$1 million, and Priscilla Chan, wife of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, added \$750,000. Others include Marissa Mayer, of Google and Yahoo, \$200,000, and Laurene Powell Jobs, widow of the Apple founder, \$400,000.

The surge of campaign cash is powering the media campaign that appears to have boosted Newsom’s prospects of survival. While the poll numbers have fluctuated considerably—but always showing Newsom and the “no” vote in the lead—the ballot numbers reported so far suggest that recall advocates’ hopes of a hugely disproportionate turnout among Republicans will not materialize.

A clear sign of the flagging fortunes of the recall campaign is the turn by its advocates to preemptive claims that the election is being stolen by Newsom and the Democrats. The most prominent advocate of the “stolen elections” hoax, ex-President Donald Trump, weighed in on Tuesday, telling Newsmax, “It’s probably rigged. They’re sending out all ballots, the ballots are mail-in ballots,” adding that in those circumstances, “no one is going to win except these Democrats.”

The only candidate in the elections who is advancing a program that represents the interests of the working class is the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party. The WSWS urges its readers to vote “no” on the recall, but to reject the bipartisan conspiracy against the working class and fight for a program to eradicate the pandemic by voting for David Moore .



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