

Field Poll: Yee's departure aids Padilla in secretary of state's race

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FIELD POLL: SECRETARY OF STATE'S RACE

In the aftermath of Sen. Leland Yee's arrest and subsequent withdrawal from the race, California voters' top choices for secretary of state are Republican Pete Peterson and Democrat Sen. Alex Padilla.

	With Yee	Without Yee
Pete Peterson (R)	27%	30%
Alex Padilla (D)	10%	17%
Leland Yee (D)	8%	—
David Curtis (Green)	4%	5%
Dan Schnur (NPP*)	4%	4%
Derek Cressman (D)	2%	3%
Other	1%	* Less than 1/2 of 1%
Undecided	44%	41%

Note: The poll was conducted March 18 to April 5, in English and Spanish, via land line and mobile phone, of 1,000 California registered voters, including 504 voters considered likely to vote in the June 3 election – 212 interviewed before news of Yee's arrest became public and 292 afterward. The results from before Yee's arrest carry a margin of error of plus or minus 6.5 percentage points, while the margin from those interviewed afterward is 5.5 points.

Source: Field Poll

*No party preference

The Sacramento Bee

Pete Peterson and Alex Padilla have dashed out to an early lead in the wide-open race for secretary of state, with Padilla gaining considerable ground since fellow Democratic state Sen. Leland Yee withdrew from the contest amid a sweeping federal corruption probe, according to a new Field Poll.

Peterson, a Republican who is the director of the Davenport Institute at Pepperdine University, has the support of 30 percent of likely voters while 17 percent favor Padilla. Yee trailed Padilla by just 2 percentage points – 10 percent to 8 percent – prior to his arrest on corruption and gun-running charges. Support for Padilla surged 7 points after Yee's name was removed from the survey.

The top two finishers will advance to the November general election to replace Secretary of State Debra Bowen, who is termed out.

“(Yee’s) arrest significantly changes the race,” said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll. “Peterson is ahead because a significant number of Republicans are backing him,” he added. “If Padilla is able to become the non-Republican alternative, there is greater upside potential for a Democrat to broaden his or her support even beyond where Peterson is today.”

More than 4 in 10 likely voters remain undecided, and the other candidates included in the survey trail by more than 10 percentage points. About 5 percent support Green Party candidate David Curtis, 4 percent back independent Dan Schnur and 3 percent chose Democrat Derek Cressman.

Slightly less than half of the polling was conducted before news of Yee's March 26 arrest at his home in San Francisco. In the nine days that followed, the proportion of those offering a favorable opinion dropped nine points to 15 percent, and 34 percent had an unfavorable view.

Despite his withdrawal, Yee's name will remain on the June ballot, but he will not actively campaign.

The arrest has helped reverse rising public approval of the state Legislature. It also opened the door for the other candidates in the race to seize on the flow of legal action – including the indictment of Sen. Ron Calderon and the conviction of Sen. Rod Wright – to underscore their credentials as outsiders and reformers.

Padilla, best known among the candidates, implored the three suspended Democrats to resign and introduced a package of bills to bolster the Political Reform Act, including barring campaign contributions to lawmakers in the last 100 days of a session.

Cressman – a former leader of Common Cause, which advocates for government transparency – wants corporate money out of politics and called for creation of a standing independent ethics commission.

Schnur, who joined academia after decades as a Republican operative, wants an overall ban on fundraising during the legislative session. He recently released a video in which he rails against “out-of-control” fundraising in Sacramento. Schnur is the least well known of any of the six candidates, according to the poll. Some 79 percent of likely voters have no opinion of him, while 11 percent view him favorably and 10 percent unfavorably.

Curtis and Cressman, meanwhile, garnered no opinion from 71 percent.

Some consider this to be among the most intriguing statewide contests given the size and diversity of the field. Adding to the interest has been Schnur's decision to run as a no-party-preference candidate, perhaps neutralizing the Republican Party's weakness in registration

and with key constituencies statewide. One downside of Schnur's political independence, as reflected in the poll, is that he gets no real advantage from partisans of either major political party.

Peterson's image rating is roughly 3-to-1 in the positive direction among fellow Republicans and 3-to-1 negative among Democrats. He benefits by being the only Republican included in the survey despite the fact that, as Schnur's campaign has protested, state employee Roy Allmond also is on the ballot as a Republican.

"Peterson doesn't have any money, and there is no reason to believe he would do anything other than split that 30 percent of the vote," said Rob Stutzman, a strategist for Schnur. He added that an independent candidate could achieve as much as 23 percent of the vote in the primary.

The poll included only candidates who participated in a forum and are mentioned in media reports on the race.

As the poll is constituted, DiCamillo said it indicates that in a top-two primary, the absence of a party label appears to be a disadvantage rather than an advantage because the candidate is forfeiting support they might get from fellow partisans.

"If you are in the top two – one's a partisan and the other is a no-party-preference (candidate) – that would be an interesting test case," DiCamillo said. "I have never seen it before. I would love to poll on it. But you've got to get there first."

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