

EDITORIAL: Schnur, Padilla stand out

They are best candidates to reform political process as secretary of state.

By The Bee Editorial Board

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April 27, 2014



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There are four competent, experienced candidates running for the job of California's secretary of state in the June 3 primary election: two Democrats, one Republican and one independent.

Any of them would do a better job than the current occupant of the position: Debra Bowen, who is termed out this year.

The race for secretary of state, the state's chief elections officer, is one of the most interesting of this election season as it coincides with nationwide concern about voter fraud and voter suppression, and a series of corruption scandals that has rocked faith in the state's political process.

Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Pacoima, and Republican Pete Peterson, who runs Pepperdine University's Davenport Institute of Public Engagement and Civic Leadership, are the presumed front-runners in the race because of their party affiliations.

But they are getting vigorous challenges from two other candidates: Derek Cressman, a Democrat and voting rights advocate formerly with Common Cause of California, and Dan Schnur, a former Republican who turned independent a few years back and is director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California.

The Bee generally will endorse two candidates in partisan primary races. The top two vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, will face one another in the November runoff. In this race, The Bee recommends Schnur and Padilla.

Schnur believes the person overseeing the state's elections ought to be nonpartisan. He is committed enough to that ideal to run as an independent without the considerable resources and advantages that come with having a "D" or "R" next to one's name on the ballot. If voters look beyond the ballot designation, and we hope they do, they will see a background uniquely qualified for this job.

As a political consultant, he worked on the Republican presidential campaigns of Ronald Reagan and John McCain, and for Gov. Pete Wilson. In 2010, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger named Schnur chairman of the California Fair Political Practices Commission, which gave him a clear view of what needs to be fixed in the political process.

Schnur has specific, achievable ideas about improving voter engagement, such as expanding voting hours, improving the absentee ballot process and fighting political corruption. To that end, Schnur intends to use the bully pulpit of this statewide office to push campaign reform, including a 24-hour disclosure rule for political contributions.

Padilla, an MIT-trained engineer, no doubt would apply his methodical mind to fixing the clunky campaign finance database and reforming a business registration process stuck in the 19th century. His background would be a plus for a position that makes important and costly decisions about technology and numbers, from assessing voting machine processes to building databases.

Padilla and Schnur have crafted campaign finance proposals to restrict fundraising; they both have the experience and the political relationships to accomplish change that this agency needs to meet the demands of elections and business for the 21st century.