

The lesson of indicted politician's 341,000 votes

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341,000 Yee votes send clear message

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When an accused arms dealer receives more than 300,000 votes in a campaign for statewide office, the most natural reaction for most of us is embarrassment. But here's an idea: We should build a statue to [Leland Yee](#).

Or perhaps we can name a school after him. But let's create a monument of some kind to Yee, and to the voter disinterest and apathy that allowed him to finish third in last week's primary campaign for California secretary of state, to remind us of what happens when the political system has become so broken that citizens don't bother to pay attention to their own governance.

As one of the candidates who finished behind Yee, I would have been very disappointed if I thought that those voters made a conscious decision to support his candidacy rather than mine. But most voters knew little or nothing about either of us, and that lack of information and interest should be a warning as to the urgency of cleaning up a polluted political culture.

I see these results not as an admonition, but as motivation for pursuing the reforms needed to restore Californians' confidence in the electoral process.

We need to convince citizens that democracy is worth their time and attention, by taking on the hyper-partisanship that has paralyzed our government and by reining in an out-of-control campaign fundraising arms race that has poisoned our politics. I campaigned on both of these issues, and despite my shortcomings as a candidate, they remain two of the most formidable obstacles that we must overcome to make government work.

Ballot initiatives that changed the redistricting process and brought in the top-two primary election created opportunities for bipartisan cooperation in Sacramento and Washington. Ultimately, voters must reward candidates who will work across party lines - and replace those who are not.

Our other daunting challenge is fundraising reform. [Supreme Court](#) rulings make it clear that the amount of money spent on political campaigns will continue to spiral upward. So weakening the link between political giving and government action is the first step toward restoring sanity to this fundraising frenzy.

That's why I've fought to ban fundraising while the Legislature is in session, and why versions of my proposal are being considered in the state Senate. The Senate's efforts are less comprehensive than my plan, but represent an important step toward acknowledging the corruption in the implicit trading of money

for votes.

Finally, we must make a greater effort to ensure that the youngest Californians recognize the importance of voting. The Millennials vote in smaller numbers than any other generation, but they volunteer at greater levels than any other generation in recent history, so it's clear they are not rejecting civic engagement - just our brand of broken politics.

Our public schools must offer more than a single semester of civics education to help our next generation of leaders understand that our democracy belongs to them, too.

Yee's vote totals told us what we already knew - that Californians have little interest in being part of a fundamentally flawed system. But we can turn the 341,000 votes that the senator received into a battle cry for a fight to clean up a corrupt political system. My campaign for elected office came up short, but the work toward meaningful political reform must continue.