

Gov. Brown sets April 5 special election to fill Perea's 31st District Assembly seat

By John Ellis
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Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday called an April 5 special election to fill the state Assembly seat vacated last month by Henry T. Perea, a decision that immediately kicks off a three-month election sprint.

Perea would have reached his term limit at the end of this year, and both Kingsburg Democrat Joaquin Arambula and Fresno Republican Clint Olivier long ago said they would seek the seat. That, however, was under the assumption Perea would have finished out his final term in office.

Joaquin Arambula is a Democrat who says he plans to run for the 31st District Assembly seat. Fresno Bee file

That regular election is still on: the primary is June 7 and the general election is in November. The winner will represent the 31st District starting in December and serve a full two-year term.

First, however, is the special election. The winner will serve out the remainder of Perea's current term, which means until early December.

"Outreach is key," Olivier said. "We have a better message and so the key to this campaign is going to be getting that message out. I'd like to say that starts tomorrow morning, but we've been working on this for the past six months."

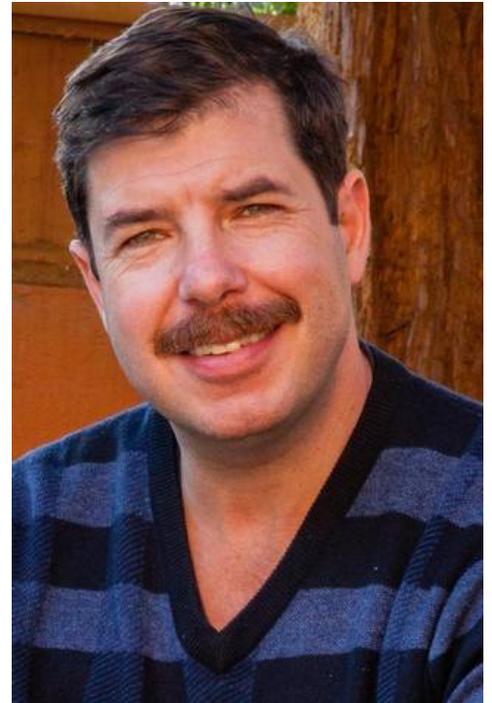
Olivier, a current Fresno City Council member, also gave a hint at the crux of his campaign: "The people who live in Palo Alto and Redondo Beach don't care about us. They don't care about our struggles here in the Central Valley. I am running to make them care."

Arambula, a doctor and son of Juan Arambula, who held the 31st District Assembly seat before Perea, put forth his own campaign theme, calling himself a "son of the Valley, with deep roots in Fresno. Every day, the people of my district show unbreakable optimism, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to make a better life for their children. I will be their champion, make certain our voices are heard, and fight tirelessly for a healthier Valley. Our campaign is ready to go."

This is how compressed this special election will be: Voters can start casting mail ballots on March 7 – just two months from now. Based on past history, turnout likely will be low because there will be no other items on the April 5 ballot. It also won't be cheap. Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth estimates Perea's decision to resign early will cost Fresno County taxpayers between \$530,000 and \$575,000 to put on the special election.

The special election also might give Olivier a chance at victory. Democrats hold a 20-percentage-point registration edge in the district, which has been represented by a Democrat for 40 years and which has rarely, if ever, provided any election drama.

But Republicans historically have done well in low-turnout special elections. One recent example is state Sen. Andy



Vidak, a Hanford Republican who won in a Democratic Party-dominated district.

Monday was the first day for potential 31st District candidates to pull papers that will allow them to get a reduced filing fee. The fee is reduced by getting registered voters to sign the paperwork. Both Arambula and Olivier pulled papers for both the special and regular 31st District elections.

The immediate question is whether any other candidates enter the race. If not, the winner of the April 5 special election will immediately be sworn in as the new 31st District Assembly member. If more candidates get in the race, someone would have to win 50 percent of the vote on April 5 to win the special election outright. If not, a special election runoff between the top two finishers would take place June 7, the same day as the regularly scheduled statewide primary.

Should that happen, 31st District voters might be confused. They would be voting on both the special election runoff and the general election primary. Fresno County taxpayers also would be on the hook for an additional \$75,000 to \$100,000 for the special election runoff costs.

One final twist would come if Olivier wins the special election (or the later regular election). He is just a year into his second term on the Fresno City Council. A special election would have to be held to fill his council seat.

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