

Article Last Updated: 11/05/2005 11:13 PM

Props' chances waning

Governor's reform agenda at stake in Tuesday vote

Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Bad news keeps piling up for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

A recent poll that elicited answers about Proposition 77 revealed the governor's dipping approval rating hurts the initiative's chances for success and that newspapers' editorial support means little. While those polled indicated they believed the legislative districts are flawed, they did not believe the proposition on Tuesday's ballot was the answer.

The results of the statewide poll Claremont McKenna College's Rose Institute of state and local government jibe with polls released in the past week that show all of the governor's reform agenda propositions -- 74, 75, 76 and 77 -- in trouble. "Everyone was thrilled to ride (Schwarzenegger's) prestige to victory, but those coattails have turned out to be a real drag," said Doug Johnson, who headed the poll research and is an institute consulting fellow. "I think the biggest surprise was that most newspapers across the state had endorsed redistricting but it didn't have much influence."

The redistricting proposition would remove the authority of creating legislative districts from legislators and give the authority to retired judges appointed the state legislature. Any plan would then have to be ratified by the voters before being implemented. Only 9 percent of likely voters said their local paper endorsed the proposition, 14 percent said local papers opposed it, and 77 percent said they had no idea, according to the results released Thursday.

Steve Poizner, chairman of the Yes on Proposition 77, said the more than 73 newspaper editorial boards supporting the redistricting initiative will pay dividends as voters review the proposition during this weekend.

"It's unprecedented for so many newspapers to endorse a proposition, and I think when people get serious about studying the specifics we will win on the merits," he said.

Poizner disputed the Rose Institute's numbers, which show the proposition losing -- 34 percent voting yes to 50 percent voting no - as well as other polls from the Public Policy Institute of California, Field Poll and Los Angeles Times polls. Rather, he pointed to the Stanford University's Hoover Institution poll -- 55 percent in support to 45 opposed -- as a more accurate reflection of Election Day.

UC Berkeley government Professor Bruce Cain, who backs redistricting but opposes Proposition 77, said the editorials will mean nothing come Tuesday.

"I have talked to dozens and dozens of editorial boards on reform issues, and they always say that we can't be in the business of opposing reform, no matter how flawed," he said. "The problem is that this was a redo of past proposals, it's antiquated. Voters know that editorial boards have to posture so many don't even bother to look at the editorials."

Cain said that any redistricting proposal needs to include more citizen participation and shouldn't be rammed through. The initiative, if passed, would create a new redistricting plan for the 2006 elections.

But Ron Nehring, vice chairman of the California Republican Party, said that the redistricting initiative, as well as other reform propositions, will do better than most of the polls predict.

"There is always an excuse to avoid reform, it isn't the right time or this isn't the right solution," he said. "Organized labor spending over \$150 million, jumping up and down on the governor's head, highlights the need for reform."

The Rose Institute poll gave the governor a 39 percent approval rating and shows that 57 percent of those surveyed back the idea of a more representative panel of California residents on a redistricting committee and that a majority find the television ads, pro and con, unconvincing.

ONLINE EXTRA:

Link: <http://research.mckenna.edu/>

(The Rose Institute has conducted research and public education outreach on redistricting reform since 1973. The Institute is playing a central role in California's current debate on this issue)

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