

California Politics and Legal Cannabis: The State Primary

With medical marijuana more than two decades old in the Golden State, and with recreational cannabis the new kid on the block but warmly embraced by California overall, it's inconceivable to think that legal weed will be uprooted from our soil, even as Attorney General Jeff Sessions and other conservatives in the Trump Administration remain in vocal opposition to the still federally illicit crop.

Whether or not we'll see a blue wave in November's general election as Democrats predict (and perhaps one shouldn't try to tea leaves), Tuesday's primary election cast legal cannabis in a favorable light (maybe marijuana leaves are easier to read). Half the State Senate's 40 seats will be decided in the fall, as well as all 53 U.S. House seats, all of the State Assembly's 80 seats and a lone U.S. Senate seat.

California's U.S. Senate Seat

Primary results will not be final until mail-in votes are counted (and those had to be postmarked by Tuesday, not received by), but preliminary results provide a good snapshot of the politicians battling it out in November. And the future of cannabis in the state is an important issue for many.

Although Democratic California Senator Dianne Feinstein has been opposed to the legalization of cannabis for much of her career, she is a very recent convert to the belief that states should have the autonomy to develop and implement their own marijuana laws. If she hadn't shifted her cannabis stance, one has to wonder if she would have so comfortably won the Democratic primary this week. After all, fellow Democrats younger than Sen. Feinstein have thrown their weight behind legal cannabis, so if she had maintained her anti-weed stance, she may have been left behind, even with the four terms under her belt.

What's striking as well is that the state's Democratic party did not endorse Feinstein this year, saying that she is does not reflect the party's progressive values.

"I think that [Feinstein] was forced to finally come around on the issue," state cannabis policy expert Jacqueline McGowan told Leafly. "I don't think that means she's ever really going to be an ally. It's unfortunate it has taken her this long to come to terms with even medical as an acceptable use."

And Lindsay Robinson, executive director of the California Cannabis Industry Association (CCIA), said of Feinstein's longtime anti-pot position and her recent change in canna-tude: "It's been difficult to watch and I'm glad there's movement on it. We've been working on her for 20 years."

Democrat Kevin De Leon will also advance to the general election in November, although reportedly Feinstein has raised nearly 10 times the campaign funding.

The Race for Governor

Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom handily won his race for Democratic gubernatorial candidate; that's the good news for Dems. But the bad news is that another Democrat did not secure the second spot, and therefore will not lock out a GOP rival in the fall. Newsom's Republican opponent will be John Cox. Democrats had hoped L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa would face off against Newsom in the general election.

However, there's still mood for optimism from the Democrats and for cannabis advocates: the fact that Cox came in a distant second, along with polling numbers, predict that Newsom will emerge victorious in the general election. He has been a consistent advocate for legal cannabis, whereas Cox has been a staunch marijuana prohibitionist, even going so far as backing mandatory hospitalization in cannabis cases.

The complicated Congress seat of Rep. Rohrabacher

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (Huntington Beach) is not a Democrat, but he has been a friend to legal weed. He was ahead of the curve when it came to protecting medical cannabis patients from federal prosecution via the Rohrabacher-Farr amendment (now known as the Joyce Amendment), and he was instrumental in the founding of the bipartisan Congressional Cannabis Caucus, a source of several bills in Washington that are good for the industry.

Rohrabacher easily won in this week's primary. That may be a good thing for canna-preneurs, but it doesn't necessarily warm the hearts of progressives. Rohrabacher has advocated for legal cannabis, but one wouldn't call him an advocate of immigrants, or of the LGBT community (he recently opposed a measure for fair housing for LGBT individuals). Further, Rohrabacher has been a Trump supporter, and has had ties with Russia, facts that make progressives uneasy.

His prospects of winning in November worry Democrats in terms of the party's goal of turning the red blue, even as Robinson of the CCIA acknowledged his efforts to advance legal cannabis and admitted to Leafly that "we wouldn't be here without [Rohrabacher]."

Six out of ten Americans have a favorable view of legal marijuana

Other cannabis proponents winning their primaries on Tuesday include Alex Padilla (Secretary of State), Betty Yee (Controller), Fiona Ma (Treasurer), and Xavier Becerra (Attorney General).

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in October 2017 revealed that over 60% of Americans believe that cannabis use should be legal. At the start of the new millennium, a mere 31% of the country took that stance, so Feinstein's change of heart follows the canna-expansive thinking of the nation over the last dozen-plus years.

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