

San Diego County and City Pre-Election Poll

By John Nienstedt

- * **Mayor Murphy Leads but Race for Second Place is Tight**
- * **Despite Many Undecideds, Aguirre Leads City Attorney's Race**
- * **Prop C Leads But Far Below the 2/3rds Required**
- * **Prop A/Rural Lands Initiative is in Big Trouble**

San Diego Mayor's Race

Incumbent Mayor Dick Murphy leads his two challengers by a substantial margin, but with so many undecided voters Murphy may well be headed to a November runoff. Murphy gets 33% of the vote, more than the combined total of Port Commissioner and businessman Peter Q. Davis (15%), County Supervisor Ron Roberts (13%) and ecologist Jim Bell (3%). The unanswered question is which candidate Murphy will face in the event of a runoff.

The picture is a little different among the city's likeliest voters. Murphy gets a bump here, taking 35% of the vote, but Roberts gets a larger bump. Among the likeliest voters, Roberts now places second with 19% and Davis is at 18%. A lower turnout should therefore help Roberts.

As the incumbent, Murphy is the "known quantity" in this race. It is therefore unlikely that he will corral the lion's share of uncommitted voters at this late date. Most of them should go to Davis or Roberts with the prime benefactor being the one who can do the best job communicating with the electorate in the campaign's closing days. That could be Davis since he continues to outspend Roberts and Murphy with a media advertising blitz.

San Diego City Attorney's Race

The poll shows there is far less certainty when it comes to the race to replace City Attorney Casey Gwinn. Here, consumer fraud attorney Michael Aguirre with 26% of the vote leads Executive Assistant City Attorney Leslie Devaney (16%) and Deborah Berger, Deputy City Attorney (12%). But with 46% of the voters unsure who they will support at this point, Aguirre is by no means assured of victory, let alone avoiding a runoff election.

Despite the closeness of the race between Berger and Devaney, the latter appears to have the upper hand. Much of Berger's support comes from unreliable voters. Among the electorate's likeliest voters Devaney convincingly leads Berger 23% to 10% while Aguirre has 31%. Devaney gets much of her support from Republicans and conservatives while Democrats and liberals tend to support Aguirre. This could help Aguirre since the city's electorate is made up of more Democrats than Republicans.

Proposition C

Proposition C, the measure to increase the City's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) to fund public safety and a variety of programs and services is winning with 55% of the vote. It must receive at least two-thirds support to be adopted and is currently 12% below that level. On the other hand, 27% are voting "no" on Prop C, so it would be scuttled if the opposition picks up 6%. With 18% unsure how they will vote, Prop C would have to pick up two-thirds of the remaining uncommitted voters in order to become law.

But what should worry supporters is that 35% of the city's likeliest voters are lining up against Prop C. In effect, the proposition has already lost among the electorate's most crucial segment. That means proponents need to quickly accomplish two difficult tasks: convince more voters overall to support Prop C and then get reluctant voters to the polls to cast their ballot.

Prop C generates strong support from Democrats as 64% support it. But this is countered by opposition from Republicans. The fate of the measure may therefore lay in the hands of Presidential politics. If a spirited Democratic presidential primary draws more Democrats to the polls on March 2nd, this would boost Prop C's chances of passage.

Proposition A

Voters in the entire county will have the chance to vote on Proposition A which is also known as the Rural Lands Initiative. Support for the measure is mired at 21% while opposition is at 48.5% making odds of its adoption very long. With 30% unsure and supporters getting their message out via incessant television ads, Prop A's fate is not completely sealed, but prospects do not look good, especially when the county's likeliest voters are considered. A stunning 59% of that most dependable portion of the electorate opposes Prop A (49% of them say they "definitely" will be voting against it). Just 24% in this group are voting "yes."

Interestingly, the survey finds that voters in the East County are overwhelmingly opposed to the measure which would down-zone a large portion of the backcountry. Just 3% in the region where Prop A would be operable support it while 79% oppose it!

The only demographic group currently backing Prop A is very liberal voters where support out-polls opposition 37% to 27%. But in a county where almost half the voters profess a conservative ideology, Prop A's limited appeal along ideological lines is not a recipe for success.