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Reader's poll

Respondents: Measure M, yes; Governor Schwarzenegger, no

Measure M, the proposed moratorium on genetically modified organisms in Sonoma County, is leading in an informal poll of Press Democrat letter writers. But many remain undecided.

In a survey conducted last week, 44 percent said they will vote for the initiative, 39 percent said they would vote against it, and 17 percent said they were not sure how they would vote. Sixty-two percent of the respondents say they have all the information they need to cast a confident vote, but 38 percent - a large number - say they don't.

Note that there is nothing scientific about this sample. We asked 894 recent letter writers to respond to our online poll; 26 percent, 232, completed the survey.

Those who responded are not fans of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. By a more than two-to-one margin, they oppose his decision to call a special election (yes 30 percent, no 64 percent), and they disapprove of his performance as governor (approve 28 percent, disapprove 62 percent). Statewide, the governor's approval ratings have been stuck in the mid-30s.

With this group, all the measures endorsed by the governor are trailing. In fact, every initiative on the ballot, save Measure M, is trailing.

Here's what the survey found:

MEASURE M - Asked to name the single factor that most influenced their choice, 49 percent say "society doesn't know enough about the risks associated with genetic modification." Twenty-six percent believe GMOs "promise a host of benefits in food production and medicine." Nineteen percent worry Measure M will lead to "unintended consequences."

PROPOSITION 73 - By a more than two-to-one margin (yes 29 percent, no 61 percent), respondents say they oppose the initiative that would require parental notification before a minor could receive an abortion.

PROPOSITION 74 - By a smaller margin (yes 38 percent, no 49 percent), letters writers oppose the initiative that would increase from two years to five years the waiting period for teacher tenure.

PROPOSITION 75 - By a similar margin (yes 41 percent, no 52 percent), the group opposes the measure that would require public employees unions to secure the permission of each member for using dues for political purposes.

PROPOSITION 76 - By a two-to-one margin (yes 28 percent, no 56 percent), respondents say they oppose the plan to give the governor broad new powers to reduce spending.

PROPOSITION 77 - Letters writers are almost evenly divided (yes 41 percent, no 42 percent) on the initiative that would take the authority to draw legislative boundaries away from the Legislature.

VOTING - Confirming the trend of recent elections, more than half, 52 percent, said they expect to vote by absentee ballot. Here are some of the respondents' comments (not everyone left a name):

"Those who claim that GMO food is proven harmless remind me of similar statements made by CEOs in the asbestos and tobacco industries." - Ray Waldbaum, Santa Rosa

"The idea of voting on genetic modification only here in Sonoma County seems moot if such modification is already taking place on a national level."

"The Press Democrat's editorial opposing Measure M is an act of moral cowardice ... The human race is becoming a cancer on the very biosphere which gave it life - just as a cancer cell destroys the very body that sustains it. May you all live to regret this incredibly stupid action."

"Thanks for the editorial on Measure M in Sunday's paper, which I believe gave me the information needed to make a reasoned decision on this subject." - Chris Cameron, Windsor.

"The money being spent on this special election would be better spent on balancing the state budget. I feel the governor pushed for this election to further his agenda and not to help the people of California. He has been very successful in alienating teachers, policemen, firefighters and my own profession of nursing."

"We are all tired of incessant elections, but the corrupt and incompetent state Legislature is incapable of taking the steps necessary to improve conditions in California and the governor has no choice but to turn to the people. It is a sorry state of affairs."

"I am opposed to teachers receiving tenure at all. Why is it right for them to receive that type of job security? If they go into coasting mode, it makes it too hard to get rid of them. And no one else (except maybe judges) gets that type of job security."

"(Proposition 74) is all about undermining public education by vilifying unions. It's just one more attempt to remove obstacles to privatization of education." - Mark Wardlaw, Santa Rosa.

"Proposition 77 (redistricting) is the most important proposition we have had before us in a long time. The practice of 'safe' districts needs to end now. We need to have fair contests between Democrat and Republican, and that can only come from reasonably drawn districts."

"I urge everyone to vote yes on Proposition 75. It is simply unfair to force union members to give money to political campaigns that they don't personally endorse. This needs to be done at a federal level as well. - Laurel Dudgeon, Santa Rosa.

"If unions need annual permission, why don't corporations need annual permission from stockholders to engage in political activity?"

"As long as there are angry parents willing to abuse their adolescent daughters for getting pregnant, notification of the parents (Proposition 73) should not be mandatory." - Kazuo Thow, Santa Rosa.

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