



## MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties  
From: Charlie Kelly, Executive Director, House Majority PAC  
Date: June 7, 2018  
Re: California Jungle Primary Results

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### **Overview**

Despite a myriad of complex challenges inherent in California's jungle primary system and the genuine risk that Democrats could get locked out of the November ballot in one or more pick-up opportunities in the state, the work of HMP and Democratic allies in California played a significant part in preventing this worst-case scenario in multiple at-risk districts. HMP was proud to take a leading role to ensure that California voters will have the opportunity to elect a Democrat in every competitive Congressional race this November.

### **In Depth**

#### **1. Pick-Up Opportunities**

From the beginning of the 2018 election cycle, it was clear that California would be a critical piece of the path to a Democratic majority. The state is home to seven Republican-held districts that Hillary Clinton won in 2016 – CA-10, CA-21, CA-25, CA-39, CA-45, CA-48, and CA-49. Several of the seats based entirely or at least partly in Orange County including CA-39, CA-45, CA-48, and CA-49, were clearly the type of traditionally Republican suburban districts where Democrats were seeing new opportunities. This was further cemented by an indisputable resurgence of grassroots energy and enthusiasm in these districts over the past year and a half. High-ranking Republican incumbents like Congressmen Ed Royce (CA-39) and Darrell Issa (CA-49) quickly announced their retirements last January. Issa, in particular, had faced weekly protests outside of his district office and was only narrowly re-elected in 2016.

#### **2. A Challenging System**

Democrats learned a lesson from 2012, when high-spending Republican candidates in a Congressional jungle primary led to the party being locked out in a district that otherwise should have been winnable that November. In 2016, House Majority PAC invested in the jungle primary in CA-24 successfully ensuring that a Democrat made it onto the November ballot and went on to win the election.

The 2018 jungle primary presented an even more complex puzzle – with large numbers of candidates on the ballot in multiple districts. In some districts like CA-39 the number of declared candidates was near 20. Other factors that further complicated these races included Issa's retirement in CA-49 and an unusually weak Republican incumbent, Dana Rohrabacher, in CA-48. This culminated in an even greater risk that votes could splinter and lead to Democratic lockouts in a year when the stakes were far higher than other cycles. This made it critical for House Majority PAC and its allies to thoroughly analyze the situation in each at-risk district and take action.

### **3. HMP Polling**

House Majority PAC began polling in CA-10, CA-39, CA-48, and CA-49 (Clinton-won districts where the number of candidates could create an inherent risk of lockouts) regularly at the beginning of April and continued until the day before Election Day. The group utilized a combination of newer internet polling which could simulate the lengthy and complicated California ballot in each district along with more traditional polling such as IVR's and live-interview polling. While initial polling indicated the lockout risk in CA-10 (which had fewer candidates than the other three districts) was lower, HMP continued monitoring CA-10 in case action might be necessary. The final close result in CA-10 indicates that Republican Congressman Jeff Denham's support likely collapsed heading into the jungle primary – indicating he has a fractured and unenthusiastic base which he should view as a troubling sign for the fall.

HMP's polling, however, showed from early on that there was a significant risk of lockouts in CA-39, CA-48, and CA-49.

HMP's first two polls in CA-39 indicated a lockout with either Republican Bob Huff or Shawn Nelson taking the second spot to Republican Young Kim.

In CA-48, initial polling showed a crowded race with no clear favorite for second place to Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher. A subsequent, more comprehensive, poll was fielded April 24<sup>th</sup> to April 26<sup>th</sup> in CA-48 and indicated a lockout in the initial head-to-head with Republican Scott Baugh taking second place to Rohrabacher.

In CA-49, HMP's first polls showed an incredibly crowded race with a poll fielded April 11<sup>th</sup> to April 12<sup>th</sup> finding three candidates tied for first place including Republican Rocky Chavez. A subsequent poll two weeks later had variations in order but found that the race continued to be crowded and unpredictable, with all of the top four candidates separated by no more than two percentage points.

### **4. Plan of Action – Messaging**

Based on the internal polling, House Majority PAC determined that the best possible course of action was to mainly focus on driving down Republican candidates who could take one or both of the top spots on the ballot in each district at risk for a lockout. HMP utilized messaging across media platforms that would largely weaken targeted Republican candidates with a broad range of voters in each district, including Republican and no party preference voters.

In CA-39, HMP primarily targeted Republican Shawn Nelson for his hypocrisy on taxpayer funded pensions and Republican Bob Huff for his history of backing higher taxes in Sacramento.

In CA-48, HMP targeted Republican Scott Baugh for being a career politician with a record of run-ins with the law.

In CA-49, HMP targeted Republican Rocky Chavez for taking taxpayer-funded pay raises and wasting taxpayer dollars as a Sacramento politician.

## **5. Plan of Action – Leading the Way**

In the first week of May, House Majority PAC organized strategic conference calls with a number of progressive Independent Expenditure partner groups, including SEIU California, Fight Back CA, EDF Action, Priorities USA Action, CHC BOLD PAC, and NextGen to coordinate the progressive I.E. effort in the California Congressional jungle primaries. HMP led the way in providing targeting and messaging guidance based on its own polling and data, ensuring that all partners would avoid duplication of dollars for the most coordinated, organized, and strategic effort possible among various Independent Expenditure partners.

## **6. Plan of Action – Investments**

House Majority PAC invested in CA-39, CA-48, and CA-49 with an extensive media campaign across platforms utilizing the above-described messaging beginning on May 15 with direct mail. HMP launched multi-piece direct mail programs against targeted Republican candidates in all three districts that totaled more than \$500,000 combined. In CA-39, HMP also sent direct mail spotlighting fringe Republican candidate Phil Liberatore for his extreme views and support of Donald Trump. As of now, Liberatore is in third in the CA-39 vote count, siphoning off a significant portion of the GOP vote in the district. Additionally, HMP partnered with VoteVets to fund and launch a direct mail program boosting Democrat Gil Cisneros in CA-39 that totaled approximately \$100,000.

HMP also partnered with Priorities USA Action for a joint [\\$270,000 digital program](#) which also launched the same week as the direct mail and targeted Republicans Huff, Nelson, Baugh, and Chavez with the same messaging as HMP's direct mail. The digital ads ran on a variety of internet platforms and services.

Continued HMP polling in May largely indicated a decreasing risk of a lockout in all three districts; however, the greatest risk of a lockout continued to appear to be in CA-48 where Dana Rohrabacher's weaknesses with Republican voters were evident. House Majority PAC went on air in CA-48 beginning on May 29 through Election Day with a TV ad, titled "[Sweet Tooth](#)," that targeted Scott Baugh for his troubling record as a law-breaking politician and was backed with a buy of more than \$650,000 on broadcast and cable in the LA media market.

## **Looking Forward**

While final and full results are still being counted across California, it is clear that despite facing a host of significant structural challenges in the California jungle primary, Democratic candidates have secured spots on the ballot in every competitive California Congressional race. This is thanks to the extensive efforts of groups on both the coordinated and I.E. sides, and House Majority PAC is proud to have played a significant part in this success. Despite fears of an impending Democratic disaster in California – the combination of incredible grassroots energy, great Democratic candidates, and smart, data-based, strategic media investments by progressive groups like House Majority PAC has ensured that these newly competitive districts will very much be in play this November. With California's seven Clinton-won districts on the board, a total of 25 Clinton-won districts in play (accounting for Pennsylvania's Congressional redistricting), and strong Democratic candidates even in deep red Trump-won districts (as evidenced by

Congressman Conor Lamb's special election victory last March), the House battlefield map remains incredibly expansive from coast to coast.