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New Law to Modernize the California Filing Process for Presidential Primary Candidates Signed by Governor Newsom

SACRAMENTO, CA - Governor Gavin Newsom has signed legislation—sponsored by California Secretary of State Alex Padilla and authored by Senator Tom Umberg (D – Santa Ana) — to update the filing requirements for Presidential candidates seeking to compete in California’s primary election. Senate Bill 505 (SB 505) will take effect for the 2020 Presidential Primary.

“With California’s presidential primary moving to “primetime” in March of 2020, candidates should demonstrate that they are serious about earning the support of California voters,” said Secretary of State Alex Padilla. “Modernizing state law ensures that there are clear and transparent filing requirements for presidential candidates to meet in order to appear on the California ballot in March 2020. SB 505 strengthens California’s position in the presidential nominating process, while maintaining fair access to the ballot.”

Under previous law, candidates running for a presidential nomination were not required to submit documentation or file formal paperwork with the Secretary of State’s office to appear on the California primary ballot. The Secretary of State would place the names of candidates on the ballot if they were ‘generally recognized’ as running for a party’s presidential nomination. This bill changes this process by defining criteria for how a candidate is deemed “generally recognized” as running to President and consequently placed on the California ballot.

“2016 saw a record number of candidates running for President of the United States, and that looks to be repeated heading into the 2020 Presidential Election,” said Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana). “California’s influence on national politics is undeniable. I’m glad to be authoring the law to ensure that our taxpayer resources are focused on the candidates who are serious about leading. Voting should be a simple and transparent process and this law will ensure that happens.”

SB 505 defines criteria that candidates must meet in order to qualify as being ‘generally recognized’ for a presidential nomination. The law sets minimal criteria for candidates seeking ballot access.

Candidates will simply have to submit specified documentation to the Secretary of State's office demonstrating they meet one of the following criteria:

- Qualified for funding under the Federal Election Campaign Act;
- Qualified or been placed on another state's presidential primary or caucus ballot;
- Qualified for or has appeared in another state's caucuses;
- Appeared in a national presidential debate; or
- Has the following: a campaign website, and a written request to appear on the California ballot submitted on the candidate's behalf by a qualified political party.

Candidates now must meet the criteria to be a 'generally recognized' candidate for president each election cycle. Under SB 505, the Secretary of State will announce the candidates who met the 'generally recognized' criteria 88 days prior to the primary election date. Qualifying as 'generally recognized' in 2020 will not guarantee that a candidate would make it on the ballot in 2024.

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