

Voters have distinct choices in Jan. 4 special state Senate election

By Susan Ferriss, Sacramento Bee

Voters in one of California's most conservative bastions, the 1st Senate District, will cast ballots Tuesday in a special runoff election to replace state Sen. Dave Cox, a Republican who died last July.

It's an obscure date for an election, turnout will likely be small, and political insiders say the victor is all but certain.

GOP voters have an 11-point registration advantage over Democrats in the district which includes parts of Sacramento County, all of Placer and El Dorado counties and stretches to the Oregon border.

That gives Republican Ted Gaines, 52, an indisputable leg up over his Democratic rival, Rancho Cordova Mayor Ken Cooley, 57.

But 18 percent of the district's voters are nonpartisan and Cooley could benefit from Gaines coming under attack by GOP rivals during a November primary fight for the Senate seat.

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