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GEORGE F. LEE / glee@staradvertiser.com Flanked by her son Micah Aiu, left, and Lei Ahu Isa, Donna Mercado Kim announced her candidacy for Congress on Wednesday outside 'Iolani Palace.

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State Senate President Donna Mercado Kim would win the Democratic primary for Hawaii's 1st Congressional District House of Representatives seat handily if the election were held this month, according to the latest results of the Hawaii Poll.

Kim, who's spent more years in elective office than five other candidates in the poll, scored 10 percentage points better than the second top finisher, state Rep. Mark Takai.

City Council members Stanley Chang and Ikaika Anderson, despite having spent the most money to date on the race, are in a statistical dead heat at 11 points behind Takai, according to the poll, which surveyed 272 voters in the district Feb. 1-11. The margin of error is plus/minus 5.9 points.

State Sen. Will Espero finished fifth among those polled, while community activist Kathryn Xian was last. The poll did not include Councilman Joey Manahan, who announced Friday he is also seeking the seat.

A substantial 21 percent of those polled, more than 1 in 5, either said they are undecided on the race or declined to answer.

Kim fared better among those who identified themselves as Filipino, winning 50 percent of that category, while Takai was chosen by 40 percent of those who described themselves as Japanese. Kim was the candidate with the most votes among Caucasians with 27 percent, but more than one-third of people in that category, 35 percent, said they are undecided or declined to answer.

Kim did best among those identifying themselves as 55 years old or older. Takai topped the under-35 group with 16 percent while Chang had 15 percent, but 41 percent in that category said they are undecided or declined to answer.

Neal Milner, veteran University of Hawaii political science



**Donna  
Mercado Kim:**  
*Filipinos and voters  
age 55 and older like  
the state Senate leader*



**Mark  
Takai:**  
*The state House  
lawmaker is a distant  
second behind Kim*

professor, said the poll results are not surprising in a large field where most of the candidates are still relatively unknown.

"I think that the poll shows that name recognition is probably the top factor here for who's on top and who's not," Milner said.

But Kim's lead is not overwhelming or insurmountable, especially since "the race is still in its early, not-very-well-formulated stages," Milner said.

The key to success for those behind Kim will be to get their names in circulation and then craft their messages to set themselves apart, Milner said.

"You've got a lot of candidates, and a lot of candidates who are known in certain areas but not known districtwide," Milner said. "You can't overestimate the importance of being able to put your name across in some way."

Until then, he said, "they're going to have trouble distinguishing themselves on policy."

Milner's points jibe with how each of the six candidates in the poll fared when those surveyed were asked whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them. The results indicated that with the exception of Kim, more than half of those polled either never heard of or did not know enough to form an opinion about any of the five other candidates.

That's both good and bad news for the five runners-up who have until the Aug. 9 primary election to get their names into circulation and sway voters.

Kim scored a 49 percent favorable rating, the highest among the six candidates, but also scored the highest unfavorable rating, with 22 percent.

In fact, the favorable percentage scores of the candidates correlated with how well they did in the horse-race poll, with one exception. Chang, tied for third in the horse-race poll, tied for fourth in the favorable rating.

Kim said she was pleased with the poll results.

"I'm appreciative of the vote of confidence I've received so far, but I'm not taking anything for granted," she said.

Takai said his campaign is about where he and his supporters expected it to be at this point.

"We believe our campaign momentum is growing as more voters learn about us and hear our message," he said.

Chang and Anderson said they are also optimistic.

"The August primary is a long way off and there is much more work to do," Chang said. "These results are

an initial sign of success that our message of a fresh vision in moving Hawaii forward for a better future is connecting with voters, even at this early stage."

Anderson said:"This is a wide-open race. The candidate who's going to win is the candidate who can resonate best with voters, the candidate who is going to work the hardest to reach voters, and to earn their trust."

The latest campaign accounting reports, filed with the Federal Election Commission at the end of January, show Chang and Kim in the best position financially with half a year to go.

Chang has raised the most, reporting \$432,326 in contributions. His campaign has spent \$106,869 and has \$325,457 in cash, the most available.

Kim reported total contributions of \$330,133, expenditures of only \$8,681 and \$322,451 in cash, despite not having announced her candidacy until November.

Anderson has spent the most, \$121,973. He reported contributions of \$270,481 and \$148,607 in cash.

Takai is third behind Chang and Kim in cash with \$177,879. He reported contributions of \$223,109 and \$48,836 in expenditures.

Espero reported \$74,932 in contributions, \$67,557 in expenditures and \$6,829 in cash. Xian reported \$4,245 in contributions, \$2,838 in expenditures and \$1,406 in cash.

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*Please tell me if you have a basically favorable or unfavorable opinion of these candidates, or if you have never heard of them.*

|                   | FAVORABLE | UNFAVORABLE | NEVER HEARD OF | HEARD OF BUT DON'T KNOW ENOUGH |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Donna Mercado Kim | 49%       | 22%         | 17%            | 12%                            |
| Mark Takai        | 34%       | 10%         | 36%            | 20%                            |
| Ikaika Anderson   | 33%       | 13%         | 27%            | 27%                            |
| Stanley Chang     | 22%       | 12%         | 47%            | 18%                            |
| Will Espero       | 22%       | 14%         | 43%            | 21%                            |
| Kathryn Xian      | 3%        | 4%          | 82%            | 11%                            |

Poll was conducted among 321 voters in the 1st Congressional District by telephone (landlines and cell-phones) Feb. 1-11 by Ward Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 5.5 percentage points. Numbers do not total 100 percent because of rounding.

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