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To: Interested Parties

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New Poll Finds Democrat Derek Tran Leading Republican Michelle Steel in CA-45

A recent Tulchin Research poll of likely November 2024 voters in California's 45th Congressional District shows Democrat Derek Tran leading Republican Congresswoman Michelle Steel in a tightly contested race for Congress. Conducted from September 14th-19th in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, the poll finds Tran ahead of Steel 47% to 45% (+2), overcoming a narrow summer deficit to now lead the race outright just weeks before the election. Beyond his lead, Tran's standing with voters has seen significant improvement, with his positive favorability ratings increasing substantially as voters have learned more about his compelling story and vision for the district. Conversely, Steel's favorability and job performance ratings have declined as voters have become increasingly concerned about her record, particularly her extreme efforts to ban abortion nationwide with no exceptions.

These poll results echo the conclusions of several major independent, non-partisan political prognosticators, including Cook Political Report, Inside Elections and Sabato's Crystal Ball, all of which have recently moved this race in Derek Tran's favor: Tran has the momentum, and the Democrat is well-positioned to unseat Michelle Steel in November. Detailed findings from the poll are below.

Democrat Derek Tran Leads Republican Incumbent Michelle Steel

The results are highly encouraging for Derek Tran and Democrats in their effort to unseat Republican incumbent Congresswoman Michelle Steel and win back the House. Tran—an Army veteran, workers' rights attorney, city commissioner, and small business owner—now leads Steel by 2 points, with 47% of the vote to Steel's 45%, and 8% of voters still undecided, when respondents are presented with only the candidates' names and official ballot labels and no other information.

Tran has increased his vote share by 6 points from a previous Tulchin Research poll in the 45th district conducted in the summer that showed him trailing Steel by 1 point (Tran 41%, Steel 42%, 17% undecided), marking a net 3-point shift in his favor. This surge is driven by Tran's ability to unite a diverse coalition of supporters, including now leading Steel among both Latino and Vietnamese voters—critical in this diverse district with a significant Latino population and home to the largest Vietnamese community in the country.

CA-45 General Election Vote Over Time			
If the November election for U.S. Congress were held today and the candidates were: Workers' Rights Advocate Derek Tran, the Democrat; or U.S. Representative Michelle Steel, the Republican?			
	June	September	Shift
Derek Tran	41%	47%	+6
Michelle Steel	42%	45%	+3
Undecided	17%	8%	-9
Tran - Steel	-1	+2	+3

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Tran Has Strengthened His Profile While Steel's Image Has Worsened

Tran's growing momentum in this race is highlighted by a notable increase in his positive profile since the summer as more voters have had the opportunity to learn about his personal story and his forward-looking agenda. Indeed, this latest poll shows 55% of likely voters now recognize Tran, with 35% holding a favorable opinion of him compared to 20% unfavorable, giving him a +15 net favorability rating. This is a marked improvement from the summer, when only 37% of voters knew Tran and his favorability stood at 20% favorable versus 16% unfavorable (+4) and reflects an 18-point increase in name recognition and an 11-point gain in his net favorability.

Derek Tran Favorability Ratings Over Time			
	June	September	Shift
Favorable	20%	35%	+15
Unfavorable	16%	20%	+4
Total Name ID	37%	55%	+18
Net Favorability	+4	+15	+11

While Tran's profile has risen considerably since the summer, Steel's has taken a hit as voters have learned more about her extreme record, including *her efforts to roll back reproductive rights in California and nationwide, her alignment with the most extreme elements of her party, and her extensive history of corruption*, including her ties to disgraced Orange County Supervisor Andrew Do, who is under FBI investigation for allegedly diverting millions of county tax dollars meant to feed the elderly for his personal benefit.

In the summer, Steel had a net-positive favorability rating, with 38% of voters viewing her favorably and 32% unfavorably (+6). Now, however, the Republican's ratings are underwater, with 41% holding a favorable opinion and 43% unfavorable, reflecting a net 6-point decline.

Michelle Steel Favorability Ratings Over Time			
	June	September	Shift
Favorable	38%	41%	+3
Unfavorable	32%	43%	+11
Total Name ID	69%	84%	+15
Net Favorability	+6	-2	-8

In addition to her favorable ratings, Steel's job approval marks have also dropped significantly, shifting from a positive 9-point margin in the summer—when 41% approved and 32% disapproved—to a 3-point deficit in this latest poll, with 40% approving, 43% disapproving, and 17% unsure.

Michelle Steel Job Ratings Over Time			
	June	September	Shift
Approve	41%	40%	-1
Disapprove	32%	43%	+11
Don't Know	27%	17%	-10
Net Approval	+9	-3	-12