

Twitter to overhaul user list seen as partisan

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(AP) -- Social-networking site Twitter plans to end a service that links prominent message posters with new users, a service that was criticized in California because of perceived unfairness toward GOP gubernatorial candidates.

Twitter co-founder Biz Stone said Monday the San Francisco-based company will overhaul its "suggested users" list, which links [Twitter](#) users with a pool of about 500 celebrities, sports figures and politicians they might want to follow.

"That list will be going away," Stone said at a conference in Malaysia. "In its stead will be something that is more programmatically chosen, something that actually delivers more relevant suggestions."

Names on the suggested user list are selected by company officials. In

California, Democratic gubernatorial hopefuls were placed on the list, a move that greatly boosted their number of followers. Republican candidates were left off until recently.

The difference in treatment drew outcries from good government groups and contributed to a decision by the California Fair Political Practices Commission to hold hearings next year. The commission plans to examine whether it needs to regulate how campaigns intersect with social media.

In the three weeks since an Associated Press story about the suggested user list, Twitter executives added all three of the Republican candidates seeking to replace Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is termed out of office after next year.

The switch gave each Republican a significant bump in followers, demonstrating the list's reach and influence.

Former [eBay](#) chief executive Meg Whitman, who led the Republican field with 4,160 Twitter followers, jumped to nearly 61,000 followers. Former Congressman Tom Campbell went from 1,660 followers to 57,500, while state Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner's nearly 2,600 followers increased to 56,500.

By comparison, Attorney General Jerry Brown, the presumed Democratic gubernatorial candidate, increased from 960,000 followers to 1 million during the same three-week period.

Twitter also added Carly Fiorina, who is seeking the Republican nomination to challenge Democratic U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer next year.

The list's expansion drew praise from Kim Alexander, president of the nonprofit California Voter Foundation. She wants to see the site

continue as an avenue for political discussion, saying it can serve as a valuable tool for voters who are just starting to get engaged in next year's campaign season.

California Republican Party Chairman Ron Nehring, however, urged Twitter to drop politicians from its favorites list if it doesn't end the list entirely.

"To include political candidates among suggested users is begging for some government entity to come in and regulate it," Nehring said.

Barbara O'Connor, a professor of political communication at Sacramento State University who teaches classes on social networking and its influence on politics, said politicians could disappear naturally from the list if users are allowed to choose their own favorites. Surveys show most would not gravitate to candidates as their first choice, she said.

The effect on political campaigns still is uncertain, said consultants to Brown and to San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Newsom had 1.1 million followers, the most of any governor candidate. Yet it didn't translate into enough campaign funding to keep him from dropping out of the race this month, said Newsom adviser Garry South.

"They're not a magic bullet," South said of [social networking sites](#). "You have to do all the new media stuff as well as all the old traditional campaign techniques."

The list already included a few national political figures from both parties, including former vice president Al Gore, Sen. John McCain and former House speaker Newt Gingrich.

Stone did not say what kind of service would take the place of the suggested user list but said it could be tailored to new users' interests. In an e-mail, Twitter spokeswoman Jenna Sampson said the company could provide no more details.

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