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Sweeney to endorse Booker in Deptford press conference

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Newark Mayor Cory Booker announces his plans to run for the U.S. Senate seat that opened with the death of Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) in Newark, N.J. Booker, 44, is currently serving in his second term as mayor.

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South Jersey's statehouse Democrats are expected to give Newark Mayor Cory Booker a collective thumbs up today in a press conference in Deptford announcing support for Booker's U.S. Senate campaign.

Booker filed to run in the August primary election for the federal post that had been held by Sen. Frank Lautenberg until his death earlier this month.

State Attorney General Jeff Chiesa was appointed by Gov. Chris Christie to hold the seat until the special elections.

Lautenberg had not planned to run for re-election when his term ended in 2014. Booker had already expressed an interest in running for the seat next year.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-3, of West Deptford) and Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-6, of Mount Holly) are expected to lead the endorsement announcement this afternoon.

"I think we're all together," said Assemblyman John Burzichelli (D-3, of Paulsboro) Tuesday night.

The assemblyman is also expect to attend the event.

Greenwald said Tuesday he and Booker share similar commitments advancing gun protection laws, marriage equality and women's health issues.

Sweeney and Greenwald's endorsement comes more than a week after *Philadelphia Inquirer* co-owner and South Jersey power broker George Norcross pledged his support to Booker's campaign.

So far, the Newark mayor — who is running in the primary against U.S. Reps. Frank Pallone and Rush Holt and state Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver — is favored among Democrats. According to the Rutgers University Eagleton Poll, 55 percent of registered Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents would vote for Booker. The poll put Pallone at 9 percent and Holt at 8 percent. Oliver had not yet filed to run in the race when the poll was conducted.

The press conference could be another opportunity for Democrats to blast the governor for choosing to hold a special U.S. Senate election on Oct. 15 instead of waiting for a month for the general election.

Together, the required August primary and the October special election are expected to cost the state \$24 million.

Eggleton Poll also indicated that only 12 percent of respondents strongly opposed Christie's decision to hold a separate October election to decide the Senate race.

More than three quarters of those polled wanted the elections combined.

An appellate court panel, however, has validated Christie's decision. "Without doubt," the panel said, the governor was authorized to set the election for October in this circumstance.

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