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State AGs

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## Analyst: Shurtleff a 'popular' AG; Democrats say he's vulnerable

by [Chris Rizo](#)

SALT LAKE CITY (Legal Newsline)-Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff is almost sure to be re-elected to a third term, barring any unforeseen scandals involving the Republican, a leading political analyst told Legal Newsline.

"Mark Shurtleff is a popular politician and most people approve of his job, so I would put him in the fairly safe category," said Kirk Jowers, director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah.

Shurtleff was re-elected in 2004 with 68 percent support in the predominately Republican state.

While Shurtleff has taken a "strong stand" against polygamous, Jowers said Friday the Utah attorney general stopped short of conducting raids and widespread crackdowns, as happened recently in Texas against members of The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

For his approach to polygamous scofflaws, Shurtleff has taken some flack. Perhaps most notable was criticism from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., who said authorities in Utah and Arizona turned "a blind eye" to the issue of forced marriage and other alleged abuses.

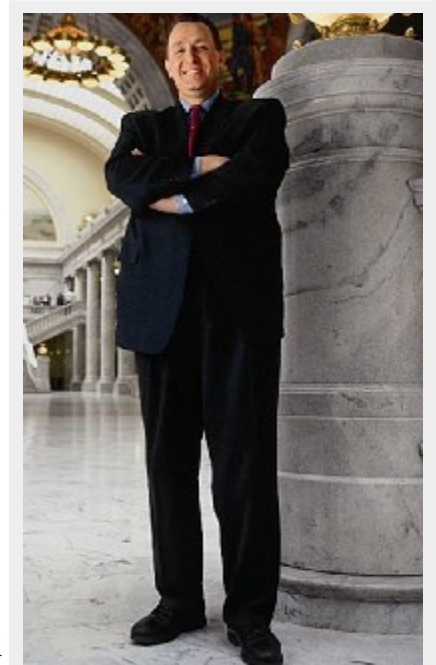
The legal morass that was created when Texas Child Protective Services removed more than 400 children from the sect's sprawling YFZ Ranch near Eldorado, Texas, has helped buttress Shurtleff's "pragmatic" approach, Jowers said.

"As we've watched what has occurred down in Texas with the FLDS church, that has only helped vindicate the more pragmatic approach to attacking some of the abuses in the polygamous community," Jowers said from his office in Salt Lake City.

A recent poll shows Shurtleff, a former Salt Lake County commissioner, with 65 percent support among likely voters in November.

Although Shurtleff did not face a Republican challenger, he does face opponents: Democrat Jean Welch Hill, whom Shurtleff stripped of her title of assistant attorney general, and Libertarian attorney Andrew McCullough.

"Winning a statewide race in Utah for a Democrat takes a unique individual and a set of circumstances with the



Mark Shurtleff

Republican opponent to open that door," Jowers said. "I don't believe Shurtleff has opened the door; he is not vulnerable, his seat is not ripe for the taking."

Laura Bonham, chair of the Utah Democratic Party's Progressive Caucus, said Shurtleff's support for a controversial school voucher plan may have cracked the electoral door for his Democratic opponent.

Besides, she said, "it's becoming easier" for Democrats to get elected in the Beehive State.

Bonham said the race to unseat Shurtleff is "a totally winnable race," for Hill, noting that Utah has had a Democratic attorney general, Jan Graham.

Hill, a longtime attorney for the Utah State Board of Education, was stripped of her title assistant attorney general last year by Shurtleff over her official recommendation to schools not to implement a voucher system for Utah's schools.

The Deseret News and KSL-TV poll released last week indicates Hill has 17 percent support and McCullough 3 percent. Thirteen percent of the 604 registered voters polled said they were undecided.

The poll indicates that Shurtleff would get 82 percent of the Republican vote, 34 percent of the Democratic vote and 54 percent of independent voters.

The poll has a margin of error plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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