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THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA POLITICS

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Much of California's political structure has been crafted by initiative in recent years, and most of it is in the hands of the courts. No one is confident of what will happen. Awaiting judicial decision are term limits, campaign finance regulation, and the open primary: There are many possibilities -- and many odds-takers -- but uncertainty will be the most characteristic quality of the coming political year. For those who like their politics to be full of unexpected twists and turns, 1998 could be a very interesting year. "Handicapping the shape of the legislature is usually like a regular chess game," a Sacramento lobbyist noted. "Now, it's like a three-dimensional chess game, wondering what will happen with all 20 senate seats, and probably 30 assembly seats."

Term Limits

Proposition 140, which was passed in 1992, limited the terms of the state legislative offices to 3 two-year terms for the Assembly, and 2 four-year terms for the Senate. Suit was brought against it immediately in the California courts, which supported it, but later in the federal courts, it was ruled unconstitutional by Judge Claudia Wilkin. She allowed the current limits to stand while it is appealed up the line to the 9th District Court of Appeals. The District court is one of the most liberal in the country. Three judges heard the appeal for the 9th District and held the law unconstitutional because the voters were not told that the law included a lifetime ban on holding the same office again. And they lifted the stay. Observers believe the case was decided on the narrow question of what the voters knew to protect it from being taken up by the Supreme Court. Instead, the case went to the full 9th District *en banc*, and—at this writing—the stay has been re-imposed. Everyone in elected politics is waiting for one shoe or another to drop.

If the stay is lifted, and if the law is over-turned, it will have a domino effect on many candidates now running for office. As one astute political observer put it, "If term limits are ruled out, it will be like trying to put the tooth paste back into the tube." Some incumbents will chose to stay where they are, and some will be forced to stay because the open seats they thought were going to be above them on the electoral ladder will be taken. Some will run anyway, but they will face other uncertainties in fund raising and, possibly, even in the primary electoral contest. If the limits are lifted, the California legislature is likely to be dominated for some years by those now in office, most of whom have relatively little experience now. On the other hand, if the limits are lifted, experience is the one thing they will have.

If term limits are upheld, the rush will be on as one class after another is termed out of office, but one lesson we have learned about term limits is that they almost

always guarantee that those in office will serve the full measure of their terms while potential challengers wait them out. It is usually easier to run for an open seat when the odds are significantly better. Incumbent advantage is, and always was, a very powerful force because of the higher name recognition an incumbent has and, and now particularly, because of the greater ease an incumbent will have raising money to mount a campaign, given the new strict contribution limits of the campaign law currently in effect.

One of the clearest examples of those who would rather stay where they are, for instance, is Democrat Bill Lockyer, the powerful president pro tempore of the State Senate. If term limits are upheld, he will run for state attorney general. If they are not upheld, he will clearly be the most powerful man on the legislative side of state government, and that is a position few would like to give up. The tremendous uncertainty makes the probability that others will challenge the current leadership now less likely than it might have been because it takes a serious campaign to put the votes together for a challenge and few are willing to spend the time and energy it do it at this point. Although there are likely to be a number of challenges to the leadership in both parties if the limits are lifted or thrown out entirely.

The Political Balance

Another complication is the timing. Democrats could lose a couple of seats in close districts if the term limits stand in 1998 but, in the 2000 election, Republicans are much more vulnerable because they have more incumbents who will be termed out of office. If they lose most -- or even some of those seats -- the G.O.P. risks longer term cuts because of the redistricting that will occur following the 2000 census. Gerrymandering to protect incumbents has always been a highly regarded art form in California, and it will be an even clearer cut game in 1998 because the governor's seat will be open. At this writing in the fall, the top two potential Democratic contenders (U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein and Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis) beat the top Republican contender Attorney General Dan Lungren in the polls). Lungren, in fact, has never been in the lead in the polls, although there are no overwhelmingly strong contenders within the G.O.P. to threaten his nomination.

Effect to Date

In the meantime, it is fair to ask whether or not the term limits already applied have helped or hurt the legislative process. The argument against term limits is that it leaves us with a government of amateurs. Many Californians, of course, like that idea. Term limits are designed to do away with the professional politician and all the negatives that implies. On the eve of last year's election, however, many were predicting -- considering no one in the state legislature will have held his or her job for more than four years -- greater partisanship, confusion, and greater benefits to those who did know the rules: particularly lobbyists.

Observers feared the increase in partisanship would come because newly-elected legislators would not know whom to trust and in their uncertainty, would rely on the party caucus for guidance. That may be true, but lobbyists -- who were always expected to gain more influence in such a situation -- are, in fact, also beginning to come into their own. Even so, they, at least, know the rules and understand the process.

Another theory about increased partisanship is based on the nature of "marginal" seats -- those whose voters are so balanced between the parties they could swing either way. The theory being espoused in California is that marginal incumbents must rely more on their party than safe incumbents because they are more dependent on party backing for their re-election campaigns than incumbents who have held office for many years and have built up personal ties in their districts. This theory of the consequences of marginality runs counter to the traditional theory that marginal incumbents are moderate -- e.g., less partisan -- because they need to appeal to the swing voters in both parties. The explanation for the difference in theories is due to the term limits.

Many also argue that the legislative process is as complex as it is to encourage compromise, and that it was never meant to be a quick thing. If they are right, then the declining understanding of the process on the legislative floor in both houses will make it harder for leadership to function, no matter who is in office, because fewer members will be willing to compromise. And then, of course there is the possibility that the leadership itself is more tenuous and less sure about how to play the process, making it harder to bring their members along with them the way former speaker Willie Brown could, after so many years experience with the office.

As it is, last year the rise of the "Big Five," the governor, and the Democratic and Republican leaders of houses in the legislature, seemed larger than ever. Since Senator Lockyer was the most experienced in either house and either party, it gave him a definite edge, and made it harder in the Assembly. Speaker Cruz Bustamante has admitted "working mistakes," but a legislative leader cannot afford many mistakes -- however they are made -- or he will lose the perception of power. One leader or the other will always be more powerful than his or her fellows by sheer dint of personality and political talent, but the consensus appears to favor experience as an important factor as well, often enabling the leader to make his members at least feel that they are involved. Another explanation for the greater visibility of the Big Five is that the whole decision-making process now takes place at a different level because so many other legislators are amateurs.

The Balance of Power

Leadership at all levels in the legislature today requires a very fast learning curve because a leader has to believe he or she knows what they are doing, and has to be able to instill that confidence in others. Longtime Sacramento observers fear that the loss of real knowledge, coupled with the inner absence of confidence does not give time for newly-elected politicians to internalize their power and learn their craft. Many committee chairs felt they had to act this past year, just to prove they could. For some, it worked out well. For others, instead of acting with a broad base of support, they are either acting rashly, or are too timid to say or do much at all.

Knowing the rules of procedure matters in both houses, but ever since Willie Brown began changing the rules to keep the Democrats in power when the Assembly should have had a Republican leader, Assembly rules have become more subject to change. Once he opened the door a crack, no one has been able to close it securely since. The rules now change from month to month, and members can get so bogged down they have been known to debate how long to allow members to speak on an issue for hours – and end up limiting the debate on the issue to minutes.

Prop 140 guarantees no one will have the really long-term experience because, unless it gets thrown out of the court, it includes a lifetime ban on an office. It will not be possible to run for the Assembly, the Senate, and then the Assembly again, as did Bill Leonard, the new Republican Leader of the Assembly, even though he started before the initiative became law. His current position does reflect, at least in part, the value his colleagues place on experience.

On the other hand, the new legislators do benefit from the greater possibility of achieving leadership earlier because of the term limits. Indeed, they benefit from the necessity of rising quickly to major responsibility. While it remains a mixed blessing, one positive side effect is that it encourages political talent to rise at a much faster rate than before, particularly for those who are good at getting consensus, and establishing working relationships across party lines. Still, there is an important need for compromise and that is a process involving many sectors of society, and all the interests in an issue if it is to work. Without it, we risk making law by legislation that is no more flexible and consensual than law by initiative. Or we risk gridlock, particularly if the houses of the legislature and the governorship are not held by the same party. A lot of legislation calls for a two-thirds vote rather than a simple majority (bills having to do with money: appropriations, taxes, etc.). Getting that “super” majority may grow harder and harder.

What term limits has opened in early leadership possibility, it also opened in terms of the legislative “lame duck.” The last few years of the last term, as we have already seen, are marked by law makers looking for other opportunities to pursue their life’s goal of

public service. If the term limits are upheld by the federal courts, the starting gates will be crowded all up and down the line. The negative is loss of concentration on the office currently held. The positive may be more competitive elections and, with that, more engagement on the part of the electorate.

Campaign Finance Regulation

Contribution and Expenditure Limits

Last year's uncertainty about whether or not which, if any, of the two campaign initiatives on the ballot would pass was only partially resolved by the passage of the marginally less stringent Proposition 208, sponsored by Common Cause and the League of Women Voters. Now the whole issue is complicated by the uncertainty of what the court will do (which, if any, of its parts will be deemed unconstitutional by the judicial branch) -- and, by what unintended consequences are likely to ensue given the changed rules.

Prop 208 puts severe restrictions on campaign fund raising, limiting contributions to \$100 for those in districts represented by fewer than 100,000 people; and \$250 for those in larger districts, and \$500 for statewide races. It also puts a limit on campaign expenditures (e.g., \$150,000 -- with a top contribution not to exceed \$500 -- for assembly candidates), and on the proportionate amount to be raised by different entities (75 percent coming from individuals). The law also prohibits one candidate from helping another, a favorite leadership-buying device that often made legislative leaders the leading contributor in close races in both parties.

The limits are felt to be particularly stringent now because they follow a period of no limits. The courts threw out the campaign finance initiative passed several years ago. In the interim, campaign spending in California has soared, with most of it going to paid media ads and professional campaign consultants. The question is, what will the consultants do now? An assembly race limit of \$150,000 does not leave much of a budget for consultants, and that has only to be multiplied by all the races at all levels of government.¹ And how will California politicians campaign for office? Will they resort to old fashioned grassroots organizations in lieu of paid advertisements? For some parts of the state, that would be an almost unheard of departure from tradition. The strongest opponents of 208, however, are the single issue groups on all sides of the political spectrum. It is through campaigns that they raise money to sustain themselves as well as the causes they espouse. And if they are seriously limited, they may also be seriously curtailed. It is very much a First Amendment issue for them, whether one agrees or disagrees with their causes or their behavior.

Independent Expenditures

If one wanted to be an optimist, it is possible to see the apparent development of independent expenditures as a test of the ingenuity of our political leaders, but that will give campaign reformers cold comfort. With the limits imposed on candidate campaigns -- and even with the limits imposed on media ads by committees that require the top five contributors be named in the ad -- the odds are that California will see a shift from candidate-based campaigning to campaigns run by independent expenditure committees. Independent expenditures were defined by the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976 as expenditures made by individuals or committees who have contact with neither the candidate nor his or her campaign committee. The Court held that money is equated with the ability to communicate in our society, and that to limit it would be to limit our First Amendment right of free speech. They can campaign for or against a candidate or an issue. They can say whatever they want in their ads. And they may garner a great deal more money and attention if the consultants have their way because they will undoubtedly have a bigger voice than the candidates given their ability to raise more money and buy more air time.

Some analysts argue that the move toward independent spending will undercut the move toward greater disclosure and what we will see in the end is more money hidden from public view because only the top five contributors are required to be listed on media ads for groups making independent expenditures. Granted, it is a step forward to list even those five, but that may turn out to be a relatively small step, especially if we see far more independent spending than usual.

Usually, independent expenditures are made with some caution, although the most controversial campaign media in the past was due to them. The infamous "Willie Horton" ad in the 1988 presidential campaign showed a black man released from a Massachusetts prison committing a rape and murder. It was designed to show Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis as weak on crime. And it worked. The ad was made independently of both the Republican Party and the Bush campaign, and it was aired by state Republican parties and other groups around the country -- paid for without direct contact with the Bush/Dole campaign. On the other hand, perhaps the most infamous ad from a consultant's point of view was the full-page ad taken out by a conservative in the 1980 presidential primary campaign supporting former Texas governor John Connally. The ad made the point that Connally was the candidate for business. It happened to be directly contrary to the message the Connally campaign was trying to send to voters and, while it could not be directly attributed to the Texan's poor showing, he got only one delegate to the G.O.P. convention that year.

Campaign Risks

Campaign managers have always been uneasy about independent expenditures because they run many risks, confusing the message, or even sending the wrong message, given the campaign's analysis of where its votes are likely to lie. In 1984, many presidential campaign managers brought potential independent spenders to a meeting early in the race, explained their strategy, and told them at the end of the meeting that since they now knew the strategy they could no longer claim to be "independent."

The truth is, however, that up until a few years ago, most independent spending was done at the presidential level -- the one place it was likely to be least effective because of the visibility presidential campaigns receive.² They are most likely to be effective at lower levels of the electoral ladder, where information about the candidates -- and the issues -- is not well known, and that is exactly what Proposition 208 is likely to encourage. California will not see less money spent in campaigns. It will see growing amounts, only most of the growth will be outside the influence of candidate-based campaigns.

Son of Proposition 13

Another reason for the growth of independent campaigns will be the increased number of local elections held as a result of 1996's Proposition 218, sometimes known as "Son of Prop 13," the famous property tax initiative of 1978. Many local communities compensated for the loss of property tax revenue by increasing fees and assessments. Prop 218 requires a vote by affected parties: a mail vote by property owners for special fees and assessments, weighted by the value of the property owned; and a vote by everyone for community-wide assessments. Local ballots will see a substantial increase in fee and assessment initiatives in the next few years, and these campaigns will also employ consultants and independent expenditures.

The big winners under the current campaign finance law will be candidates with tremendous name recognition before they enter the race who can gather small amounts of money from a wide array of donors, or those with personal wealth who need not be bound by fund-raising limits. There are two such candidates already exploring the 1998 gubernatorial race: Democrat Al Checchi on the left; and Republican Darryl Issa on the right. Both are businessmen who believe they can bring their skills to the state and are known to have "deep pockets." Very deep pockets as it turns out.

The broad questions about campaign finance regulation should be about the quality of campaigns. A great deal of money spent in projecting a media image has been known to go a long way in California. Two recent examples are the very close election that resulted when Michael Huffington campaigned against Dianne Feinstein for

the U.S. Senate in 1994, and the election of Richard Riordan as mayor of Los Angeles in 1993, competing originally in a field of 24 candidates. On the other hand, there are many who argue that stringent laws that make it difficult to raise money may not distort an image, but they very well make it impossible to get a message out. How is democracy best served? The limit of \$100 per contributor for election districts of under 100,000 gives no leeway for cities such as Compton, with a population of 99,500. In fact, local elections may be more encumbered by the law than we yet realize. It raises the question of whether or not there is a middle ground?

If the term limits of 140 and the campaign finance regulations of 208 are both thrown out by the courts, odds are something will be substituted. But we probably will not be going back to where we were as a state before these initiatives passed. It will be a different environment.

Open Primaries

The last of the big three initiatives to throw the California political structure into turmoil is the adoption of open primaries. This means that all registered voters will be permitted to vote in primary elections: Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, as well as all those registered in the minor parties such as the Green Party or Peace and Freedom. Voters will be able to cast their vote for any candidate in any party, and the general election will see the winners in each party pitted against each other. If Republican X, for instance, wins 48 percent of her party's ballot, she will be pitted against Democrat Y, who may only have garnered 24 percent of her party's voters. Even if X won 51 percent of the vote, the general election would still see X and Y and all the main party candidates on the ballot in the primary opposing each other on the ballot.

The theory put forth by advocates of the open primary is that the candidates who emerge as winners are more likely to be centrist, not representing the ideological extremes in either party. The theory is based on the assumption that Independent voters are not especially apt to be ideological extremists. The major argument against it is that voting loyalists of one party would cross-over and vote for the weakest candidate in the other party, hoping that the general election will see their candidate in a very strong position.

A third possibility -- one that doesn't seem to get much attention -- is that Independents won't come out and vote at all, and that primary voters, who generally represent the most partisan and the most ideological within their respective parties, will still dominate the outcome. Primarily elections have not historically been high turnout elections. A twenty percent turnout of the vote is common. Maybe, with all registered voters able to participate, primaries will take on a different air with different results, but since both major parties in the state strongly opposed the open primary, and both are considering other options -- such as party caucuses to select a candidate whom

they would then back in the primary -- it remains to be seen what impact the open primary itself will have.

The Test Comes Soon

Of course, should the parties go ahead with the plan to select their preference by caucus, that, too, will have an impact, placing a higher probability that the candidate elected is the candidate who can draw out the most supporters to a caucus. Experience with caucuses during presidential primary campaigns suggests that those who go to the trouble of turning up for a minimum of several hours are more likely to be dedicated partisans than those who might drop in at a polling place or send in an absentee ballot. Media -- especially paid media -- may play less of a role, but ideological preferences may not be affected. The most activist segment of the Republican Party remains the Christian Right, and the most activist segment of the Democratic Party leans to the left. Not as far to the left as it once did, perhaps, but decidedly more liberal than the mainstream.

California will test all of these assumptions in the spring of 1988. There will be competition for every statewide office, from governor on down; and a significant portion of the legislature will be seeking re-election or competing for the open seats of those who are termed out, unless, of course, the court stays the limitations. There will be a wide array of candidate-types running, from seasoned politics pros, to ideologues, to rich businessmen deciding to "give back," and make their own contributions. And there will, of course, be a lot of money spent on the election, regardless of the condition of any of the three initiatives (term limits, campaign finance reform and the open primary). It behooves students of California politics to stock up on a lot of popcorn and watch the coming season closely.

Other State Issues Likely to Have an Impact on California Politics

The political structure provides the framework for the on-going and inevitable struggle between competing interests in the State. For generations we have balanced Northern and Southern California needs; urban and rural needs; coastal versus inland interests; and a host of other issues, including -- and especially -- ethnic competition and immigration. Water remains a potent political divider. The deregulation of the electric industry -- mandated by the federal government -- will begin to take effect. And issues of crime, education and welfare will rise and fall on the public's consciousness, played to a finely tuned instrument by politicians who listen to the fears and hopes of their constituents. Some of these issues will be covered elsewhere in this volume, but for those that won't it behooves us to consider their ramifications for the state political scene.

Water

The state is often divided over the issue of water transfer: usually moving it from the North, where it is plentiful, to the South. It involves competition between agricultural and urban interests, of course, but also between districts along the way. Recent focus has been on the Delta that connects the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers with the San Francisco Bay, pumping water to over 20 million Californians and providing irrigation for 5 million acres of some of the richest farmland in the nation in the Central Valley.³ Stakeholders include urban water districts (including the giant Metropolitan Water District in Southern California, East Bay MUD, and the Contra Costa Water District); Central Valley Agriculture; Environmentalists; In-Delta agriculture (those farmers through whose land the water passes); Commercial and sport fishing; the Business community; and the “Donor” districts in Northern California from whence the water comes.

All of these interests are amalgamated in a combined new federal and state hybrid agency known as CALFED (the California Water Policy Council and the Federal Ecosystem Directorate that itself includes five state and five federal agencies plus the stakeholders listed above). The goal is to find a workable and lasting solution to the water problem facing the state, including saving the Delta itself. The cost is estimated to run between \$4 to \$8 billion, but the biggest problem will be finding consensus among the competing interests.

Water is a necessity for growth in the arid South, and for sustaining the agricultural industry that feeds a good part of the nation and the world. The fact that CALFED even exists is a measure of the seriousness with which everyone takes the problem. There is also the relationship between the state and the water it draws from the Colorado River in excess of its entitlement, particularly through the MWD, which has generated complaints from surrounding states for the past 20 years. In order to live within our means, CALFED and its subsidiaries must effect core transfers of water from stepped up conservation efforts and workable transfer agreements, particularly between the urban and agricultural interests.

L.A. vs. San Diego

One possible solution generating a great deal of heat in the past year is a water transfer to San Diego from the Imperial Valley instead of the MWD. The issue is wrapped up in complex charges of hidden gain and urban competition between Los Angeles which created the MWD and San Diego, which does not want to be dependent on the Big City to its North. The charges swirled partly around the ownership of the agricultural land in the Imperial Valley by the billionaire Bass brothers of Texas. They sold their ownership in the summer of 1997, and say they no longer have any interests,

but those who are inclined to be suspicious remain so. No matter who owns the water rights, however, it is a side issue to many concerned about the more substantive problem of supporting a large population and growth in Southern California, which as a region, has the 16th largest GNP in the world. How it gets solved in the South, will also, of course, have an effect on what happens in the North.

Adding to the problem -- even with CALFED -- is the nature of the water district agencies themselves, described by one knowledgeable observer as 800 pound gorillas accustomed to getting their way. The MWD, particularly, operates like a classic monopoly, making the deals it wants and eschewing those it doesn't. It is one of the last Good Ole Boy networks in the state. An overwhelming majority within the network are older white males (with very few African Americans, Latinos, Asians or women). They are people "used to calling the shots in their own lives," and not likely to take kindly to the notion of sharing responsibility with others. Only four of the 51 members of the MWD board are elected officials accountable to someone. The rest are appointed by the twenty-seven different authorities encompassed by the district. A bill was introduced recently in Sacramento to require election to the MWD, and it (or an alternative proposal of appointment by the governor) will likely gain momentum if a solution is not found soon to its relationship with San Diego.

Bilingual Education

Although the question of bilingual education has advocates and opponents on all sides of the ideological spectrum, the fact that it is being raised as another ballot initiative by Ron Unz (a Republican candidate for governor in the last election), risks putting it in the category of another wedge issue dominating California's elections, following right on the heels of Propositions 187 (which went after illegal aliens), and 209, which targeted affirmative action, the proposition calls for a limit of one year of bilingual education and then main streaming children into the school system at large.

Perhaps the most controversial part of this is the fact that it is going the initiative rather than the legislative route, which is more suited to thinking things through and developing consensus. There are strong supporters of bilingual education who, in the past, linked it with the civil rights movement and the recognition of special needs of immigrant children. There are also strong opponents -- including many immigrant parents -- who fear their children are being tracked into an inferior education from which they will emerge unable to speak or read English. The merits of even raising the issue are likely to get lost in the sense of frustration that seems to have motivated the last several elections.

It is unclear at this writing whether or not the initiative will even qualify for the ballot, or how it will be addressed by the candidates and the parties. It could be embraced or opposed. It could try to make its own way without candidate endorsements, although

the odds of that happening are fairly low. The problem is as much timing as substance: the Republican Party -- and Pete Wilson in particular -- won the 1994 election in the state with massive support from those opposed to illegal immigration. At the time, of course, it was hard to distinguish legal from illegal immigration and it became a rallying cry for the abortive Wilson campaign for president in 1996. It turned out, however, that other states with large immigrant populations -- Florida and Texas, for example -- did not share California's anger. It resonated marginally better in New Hampshire, a state with no immigrants, mostly because "illegals" are, by definition illegal.

Proposition 209 in 1996 was often regarded as the son of 187. This time it targeted preferential treatment in the form of affirmative action given to minorities and women, since the passage of the civil rights legislation 30 years ago. From the perspective of minorities -- including immigrants -- it was a continuation of the same fears and angers of the declining white majority that motivated 187. While both propositions passed, they failed badly in the largest urban areas of the state in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and left a fear and burning resentment of their own. As Harold Meyerson, an editor of *The L.A. Weekly* remarked on a radio show sometime after the election, "There are two models of immigrant integration into American politics: the party machine model; and the Pete Wilson model."

The bilingual initiative is likely to have serious ramifications for the state's political populations. Whatever its merits, it is the campaign that will determine whether or not bilingual education will be just another wedge issue coming out of California.

Immigration and Minorities

As the California economy picks up, it is possible that the fear of immigration will subside, although there are no guarantees. Ethnic relations have always been complex in the state and Props 187 and 209 are widely considered to be a wake up call to the new populations living in the state.

* When Democrat Loretta Sanchez defeated long-time Republican Congressman Robert K. Dornan for the U.S. House in 1996 -- a battle still being waged as Dornan continues to challenge the vote -- it was thought to be a sign of the awakening sleeping giant Latino vote, particularly in Orange County, the most conservative county in the nation. Was there widespread vote fraud, or is Dornan whistling in the wind, unable to let go of an identity he has molded in the national consciousness as the right wing crank in Washington?

* Did the million more Latinos who voted in 1996 intend to stay in the electorate, or was that a passing behavior tied to the perceived explicit threats of the propositions?

* Will the campaign finance problems of the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton/Gore presidential campaign forever scare Asian Americans away from participation, or will they dig in deeper and continue to seek a voice in local and national politics?

* Will Ward Connerly, the U.C. regent and front man on the anti-affirmative action march succeed with Governor Wilson in taking the charge nationally, and how will that affect African Americans, Latinos, Asians and women in the state?

Much energy and much money went into the initiative campaigns of the past few years. Many are calling for a respite, some believe the battle is just beginning to be joined. A rising economy lifts many boats, but one of the greatest fears facing the state is a divided society between haves and have-nots, with those of color populating the lower ranks.

Distribution of State Resources

Unlike many of the other issues described in this chapter, this is a relatively new one, although it first became apparent last year when Governor Pete Wilson decided to use the state's surplus to cut the size of classrooms in early three grades of school. In 1997, the decision of what to do with the surplus took on a decidedly more political visage. The Democratically controlled Assembly and Senate planned to use it for a variety of programs, the Governor announced a major tax cut that would eat up the surplus -- depriving the Democrats of their pet projects; and finally, in the end -- after the usual complex negotiations lasting well beyond the normal time to close the legislative session, a compromise was worked out giving some tax relief and providing some money for programs.

The problem of the surplus, however, will continue to engage the state, particularly when it comes to funding urban areas. The state's welfare program in response to the federal welfare reforms is just getting off the ground, and although the subject will be dealt with in detail in another chapter in this book, it could have major political implications in both urban and rural areas. But it will take at least another year to see the consequences of the reforms and perhaps even longer before the nature of the political cleavage becomes clear.

The 1998 Election⁴

In 1998, Pete Wilson will be termed out of office (as the consequence of earlier reform having nothing to do with Prop 140), and every other constitutional office will be up for grabs. Most of the incumbents seem intent on keeping their jobs such as Secretary of State Bill Jones, Controller Kathleen Connell, and Insurance Commissioner Charles Quackenbush. But some offices will be open: governor and lieutenant governor

(Gray Davis, the incumbent lieutenant governor is running for the top slot); the attorney general (incumbent Lungren running virtually unopposed for the governorship; and treasurer -- incumbent Matt Fong who is planning on running for the U.S. Senate seat occupied by Barbara Boxer.

Other contenders for the senate seat include Susan Golding, Mayor of San Diego and Issa, who began early running radio ads in the Central Valley to increase his name recognition. Most of the attention at this stage, however, is focused on the gubernatorial race, partly because the names of potential candidates are better known, but because so much of the state's direction in the next four to eight years may hang on the outcome.

The Democratic race for governor appears to have the following contenders: Senator Dianne Feinstein, who is widely regarded as the most respected member of the Senate, but who has wanted to be governor for a long time; Gray Davis, who has worked himself up the electoral ladder carefully building for this position since the days he was chief of staff to Governor Jerry Brown in the 1970s; Leon Panetta, a former congressman who also served as Clinton's chief of staff; Al Checchi, former CEO of Northwest Airlines; and possibly Kathleen Connell, although most don't expect her to make the race at this point.

Polls show both Feinstein and Davis beating Dan Lungren, the probable nominee in the Republican Party, which is leading some Republicans to look elsewhere for a candidate, but they are not likely to find one. On the other hand, Feinstein is not prepared to commit herself and wants to wait until the end of the year when the campaign finance law may be clearer. If she decides to go, she will probably not have too hard a time raising money, given her broad name recognition. Leon Panetta might then hope to be appointed to her Senate seat should she win. Checchi, who is a liberal, has announced his willingness to put many millions of dollars of his own into the campaign, and we have seen the consequences of that in the past, when Huffington just barely lost to Feinstein in 1994. Her politics is more centrist; Checchi and Davis are more liberal. It could be interesting -- albeit painful -- to watch the same scenario from the opposite end of the political spectrum.

Feinstein may have a problem with Latino voters, given her support for stricter restraints on the Mexican border early in the immigration debate before Prop 187 was even a glimmer. But what she loses there, she might very well pick up on the other side. In a crowded race, he -- or in this case, she -- who stands alone on the ideological spectrum usually stands a good chance of coming out a winner.

The Lieutenant Governorship

The position of lieutenant governor -- usually a waiting game until the governor leaves the state, or in this case -- according to some scenarios -- if Feinstein wins in

1998, and is picked in the year 2000 as the Democratic vice presidential nominee. Former state Democratic Party Chair Phil Angelides is seeking the position (as well as being talked about as seeking the office of Treasurer, against current Controller Kathleen Connell, assuming she decides to give up her present office). They could just decide to trade. The Republican side is contested by outgoing members of the legislature: Senators Tim Leslie and Richard Mountjoy. Congressman Sonny Bono, who once thought of running for Boxer's seat, was also considered a possibility, though at this writing he has declared that he is running for re-election to his Washington position.

Other Races

Other races to watch are for attorney general, especially if State Senate President Pro Tempore Bill Lockyer decides to go for it, in which case he would be running against his number two person in the Senate, Charles Calderon. Former U.S. Representative Lynn Schenk is also in the race, but will be less well-known outside her former district. On the Republican side, candidates include the current Chief Deputy, M. David Stirling; Orange County District Attorney Michael Capizzi (who might be embroiled in a more local scandal); and Assemblymen Charles Pooshigian and Jan Goldsmith -- both of whom are termed out of office. Quentin Kopp, the sole official Independent in the Senate is also running. In his case, however, he will automatically go on the November ballot because he is not competing for party nomination.

Assembly Speaker Cruz Bustamante, also termed out, might run for Secretary of State against the former Acting Secretary Tony Miller, who lost to incumbent Bill Jones last time. Jones is seeking a second term. The position of Treasurer will be vacated by Republican Mat Fong in his run for the U.S. senate, and is being sought on the Democratic side by former Party Chair Phil Angelides, with more competition on the Republican side between Senator Jim Brulte and former Republican Party Chair John Herrington. The position of Controller is being contested on the Republican side by immediate past Assembly Republican Leader Curt Pringle and Assemblymen Jan Goldsmith and Tom McClintock. Democrat Kathleen Connell is the incumbent, and she may try to keep the position and not run for lieutenant governor.

And the last constitutional office is insurance commissioner, now held by Republican Charles Quackenbush who is running for re-election. On the Democratic side, candidates include Senator Pat Johnston, Board of Equalization Member Johan Klehs, and former state senate candidate Jeff Smith.

All of those named will probably not make the run for office in the end, but they are the names being tossed about in the fall preceding the spring primary. Most are legislators termed out of office. They want to stay on, and it is likely they will bring some valuable experience with them should they win in November. It is a slight slap in

the face to those who prefer their government to be run by amateurs and not professional politicians, but it is human nature for those who like politics, to want to participate in it.

What Makes Them Run

Being a politician is not just an issue “thing,” nor even a power trip. It is, according to Assembly Majority Leader Antonio Villaraigossa, “about relationships.” He believes he rose to a leadership role very early in his tenure partly because he is not so much a policy wonk as someone “who likes the role of bringing people together because he likes people. I like being able to go into any clique and work with people.”⁵

Many stay in politics because they like being part of the “game,” being on the inside. It becomes part of their identity. Maybe they stay too long because they are afraid they will lose that part of their identity, or that sense of being special and needed. But those who stay any length of time beyond their first election -- even those who originally ran to advance a particular issue -- stay because they tend to like people and the political process. They admire pragmatism and the ability to get things done -- even a little bit at a time -- because of long-established relationships. “It is ok if you can move the paradigm and get beyond it. Separate the issues from the demands,” says Villaraigossa. That, of course, is exactly what term limits advocates don’t like about professional politicians. Needless to say, if the term limits are lifted, it will be a whole new ball game.

Endnotes

1. The only exception to the state-imposed limits exists for charter cities in which the voters approved an alternative system of contributions and expenditures.
2. A major exception was the 1980 campaign sponsored by the NCPAC, the National Conservative Political Action Committee, that targeted 6 liberal senators. All but one of them were defeated in that election. A similar tactic was employed by organized labor in the 1996 election, targeting anti-labor candidates. It had more mixed results.
3. Steve Scott, “Restoring The Delta,” *California Journal*, May 1997.
4. I am indebted for much of the rundown on all of the candidates to Noel Brinkerhoff’s “To Run or Not to Run?”, *California Journal*, May 1997.
5. Interview, September 17, 1997.