

Secession and recall

After a quarter century of trying, conservatives and anti-tax activists in the San Fernando Valley qualified for the November 2002 ballot a vote on whether or not the Valley could secede from Los Angeles.

This year, conservatives and anti-tax activists speedily qualified for a statewide special election a vote on whether to recall Democratic Governor Gray Davis — and, barring court intervention, that election will be held in October.

Secession went down to defeat 31% to 67% citywide — dooming the proposal — and squeaked by with only 51% support in the Valley. Are there lessons in secession's defeat for both sides in the upcoming recall election?

Secession came into play because of a growing sense — particularly among Valleyites — that government was not responsive to the concerns of ordinary Angelenos. After a flurry of attention in the '70s, the secession movement languished until 1997, when a bipartisan coalition of Valley state legislators pushed through a bill to abolish the veto power of the Los Angeles City Council over any secession move. Within a year, a newly formed activist group, Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment (Valley VOTE) jumpstarted secession's unprecedented march to the ballot.

It was a long-established activist group, People's Advocate, that became an early catalyst for channeling voter frustration with state government into the gubernatorial recall. But here, the recall more closely mirrors the Hollywood secession attempt, which appeared on the same ballot as the Valley question.

The Hollywood movement was largely powered by one man, Gene LaPietra, who owned nightclubs regulated by L.A. City. He spent millions of his own money to qualify Hollywood secession for the ballot and to fund his own campaign for mayor, should the new city be approved. But, the Hollywood secession movement had no real roots; it failed both within the proposed city (69% against) and citywide (71% against).

As in the build up to the Valley secession vote, Californians' frustrations with state government simmered for a long time before the recall crystallized. But, like Hollywood secession, the recall didn't reach critical mass until one man, Congressman Darrell Issa (R-Vista), spent millions of his own money to qualify it for the ballot.

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Like the secession movement, the current recall attempt blossomed in the restless politics of Los Angeles. In 1903, nearly a decade before California embraced Progressivism, L.A. became the first city to adopt the recall.

Opponents of secession and recall include a coalition of labor and business interests worried about potential economic and political consequences, and elected officials worried about their political careers.

A civic coalition led by L.A. Mayor Jim Hahn helped to defeat secession. An ad hoc alliance of establishment interests has loosely coalesced to fight the recall. Is voter anger over Governor Davis so intense that the influence of these groups will be nullified, as it was in the Proposition 13 campaign?

Perhaps the most significant similarity between the two movements lies in a sense that both seek change, but neither really knows — or at least is able to conceptualize — what that change should be. In the secession debate, there was no consensus on, or delineation of, the direction in which a new Valley city should go. The recall reveals no consensus on a direction for the state.

Like secession, the recall entails two votes — one on the issue and one to choose an officeholder (or officeholders) who would take office only if the issue was approved. Secession proponents hoped that a large field of candidates for mayor and city council would generate a high turnout of secession supporters. It didn't. The lack of prominent contenders on the ballot only served to increase doubts among many Angelenos about the credibility of the secession proposal.

That's certainly not the case with the recall. But could its credibility suffer from too many quirky contenders?

Lastly, both the secession and recall questions, like more traditional initiatives, require a "Yes" or "No" vote. And when in doubt, Californians tend to vote "No." That helped doom secession. That is what Governor Davis and recall opponents hope will doom the recall.

With the help of California's "21st Century city," voters are taking a 19th century reform for a test drive. Like the lady said, "Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy ride." 🛖

Sherry Bebitch Jeffe is a senior scholar at USC's School of Policy, Planning & Development. Send comments to comments@californiajournal.com

by Sherry
Bebitch Jeffe



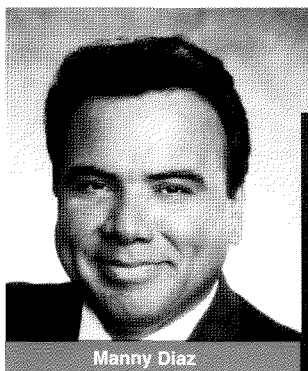
Consultants:

Who's running the top recall campaigns

Candidate	Campaign Mgr	TV Advertising	Press
Gray Davis (D)	Steve Smith	David Doak	Gabriel Sanchez
Cruz Bustamante (D)	Lynn Montgomery	Richie Ross	Luis Vizcaino
Tom McClintock (R)	John Feliz	n/a	n/a
Arnold Schwarzenegger (R)	George Gorton	Don Sipple	Karen Hanretty
Peter Ueberroth (R)	Dan Schnur	n/a	n/a
Peter Camejo (G)	Tyler Snortum-Phelps	n/a	n/a
Arianna Huffington (I)	Dean Barkley	Bill Hillsman	Parker Blackman

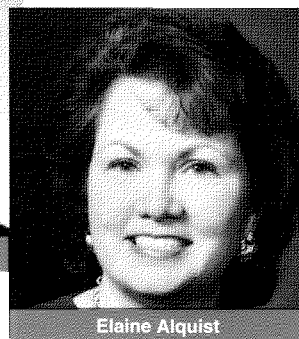
Campaign Watch

Noreen Evans, a Democratic Santa Rosa councilmember, is running in AD 7 against Democrats **Jim Leddy** and **Eric Sklar**. The seat is now held by Assm. **Patricia Wiggins**, who's running in SD 2. ... Republican **Bill MacAloney**, councilmember in Villa Park and president of JAX Markets grocery chain, is running in AD 60, which is now held by termed-out GOP Assm. Robert Pacheco. Pacheco's wife, **Gayle Pacheco**, has filed to run for the seat as has Republican **Denis Bilodeau**, who now serves on the Orange County Water District board of directors. ... **Donna Begay**, state worker and Sacramento community activist, joined the long list of Democratic candidates for AD 9, which is now held by the termed-out Darrell Steinberg. ... **Warner Bloomberg**, Green Party activist, is running in AD 23. Also running is Democrat **Joe Coto**, superintendent of the East Side Union High School District, and Democratic businesswoman **Kathy Chavez Napoli**. The seat is now held by Democrat **Manny Diaz**, who's leaving the Assembly early to run for the



Manny Diaz

Senate against former Democratic Assm. **Elaine Alquist**. ... Two Democratic candidates have emerged to run in AD 50, which is now held by the termed-out Assm. Marco Firebaugh. South Gate Mayor **Hector De La Torre** is running for the seat, as is **Xavier Reyes**, of the Coalition of Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles. ... Termed-out Democratic Sen. **Betty Karnette** is running in AD 54, as is Signal Hill Councilman **Edward H.J. Wilson**. The seat is now held by Democratic Assm. **Alan Lowenthal**, who's running for Senate. ... **Caitilin Riley**, formerly with the Legal Aid Society of San Diego, has filed to with the sec. of state as a Democrat to run against Republican **Mark Wyland** in AD 74. Wyland, who's termed out of the Assm. in 2006, has filed with the sec. of state to run in SD 38 in 2006, now held by Republican **Bill Morrow**, who's filed to run for Lt. gov. ...



Elaine Alquist

Democrat **Mary Ann Andreas**, who is on the tribal council of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, is running in AD 80 against incumbent Republican Assm. **Bonnie Garcia**. ... Republican Stockton Mayor **Gary Podesto** is running in SD 5 against incumbent Democrat Mike Machado. ...