

SACRAMENTO SPECTATOR

Your *Spectator* has said for some months that he didn't care who the Republicans nominated for president, because what was important was a nominee with coat-tails that would bring in 20 or so new Republican Congressmen to give the GOP a real majority in the House.

I'll stick to that, with this caveat about John McCain: Any candidate causing Al Hunt and every other liberal media pundit to swoon should be inspected very, very closely. Or put another way, have you ever agreed with Al Hunt or Margaret Carlson? They think McCain is the bee's knees. Think carefully, Republicans.

The "expectations game" does interesting things. Senate Republicans, led by Ross Johnson and Jim Brulte, are thought to have little chance of adding to their 15 members. Under the mantra of recruiting candidates "who match their districts," they have candidates in target seats who largely eschew conservative ideology.

In other times these candidates would have sent up howls from conservatives. The reality is that Johnson and Brulte have gotten mostly kudos all around for a group

of recruits that is impressive — if ideology doesn't matter to you.

Assembly Republicans are given a decent chance to gain four to five seats and an outside shot at the nine needed for a majority. Scott Baugh and crew is catching holy hell from conservatives for recruiting candidates in some target seats who not only call themselves "moderates" but are pro-abortion, pro-gun con-



trol, and soft on various tax issues. Perhaps it's that more was expected from Baugh or perhaps it's that activists have given up on the Senate, but Baugh is definitely playing the flak-catcher while his Senate counterparts escape.

The problem is that both Baugh and Johnson/Brulte are supporting "moderate" candidates not only in districts that demand moderates. They have also recruited jelly-spined types in districts that are arguably conservative and have histories of supporting

conservative candidates in the recent past. Being legislative leaders has been accurately described as akin to herding cats, so your *Spectator* doesn't mean to pile on these worthies. But great movements and parties unravel one string at a time, and filling the GOP caucuses with folks who disdain fundamental beliefs of the GOP base would be one more step toward marginalizing the California Republican Party.

And speaking of jelly-spines, submitted for your revolution is the fate of very liberal Republican Bruce McPherson. McPherson seems to have drawn a free pass from Senate Democrat Leader John Burton. No substantial Democrat challenged McPherson in a seat widely viewed as the most likely site of a Democrat take-away from the GOP. The chit-chat in the stylish *soirees* frequented by your *Spectator* is that Burton actively discouraged Democrat Assemblyman Fred Keeley from running as a pay-off to McPherson for his many timely votes for Democrat legislation.

It would make sense. Burton's Democrat majority is very safe. He knows McPherson — a Democrat in all but name — will throw him a vote whenever he really needs it. So why spend good Democrat money beating him? Burton gets the best of both worlds: a vote to pull out of his pocket in time of need as well as a fifth columnist inside the GOP caucus. — A. P. C.

Ron George Strikes Again

Ever eager to curry favor with the Sacramento Democrats, this time George steers California towards elections rigged against the GOP. Don't say you were not warned.

M A R K S . P U L L I A M

ACTIVIST JUDGES have long shown hostility to the initiative process, not hesitating to invalidate ballot measures enacted directly by the voters. Proposition 187 is the most notable example of election results being nullified from the bench. Recognizing that the legal establishment shares their contempt for popular sovereignty, liberals often resort to litigation in order to achieve their policy objectives when they are foiled in the political process. Rarely, however, do the black-robed solons deny citizens the opportunity even to cast a vote. That is precisely what California Chief Justice Ron George did last December 13 when he ordered Proposition 24 stricken from the March 7, 2000, ballot in *Senate of the State of California v. Jones* (21 Cal. 4th 1142).

Proposition 24, styled by its proponent, Ted Costa, as the "Let the Voters Decide Act of 2000," would have prevented the expected gerrymander of legislative and congressional districts by amending the California Constitution to provide for redistricting by a panel of "special masters" (retired state and federal judges) appointed by the California Supreme Court. (Every 10 years, legislative and congressional districts are redrawn to reflect population shifts as determined by the decennial census. Under current law, redistricting is conducted by the Legislature.) The redistricting plan developed by the special masters following public hearings would have been subject to voter approval at the next general election. Had Proposition 24 been enacted, it would have prevented the type of "back room" machinations that typically emerge from a Democrat-controlled Legislature, producing absurdly-shaped districts drawn in result-oriented fashion to conform to partisan voting patterns. Instead of achieving a level playing field through neutrally drawn districts, a gerrymander would ensure Democrat victories and Republi-

can defeats for a decade to come. (Only a veto by then-Governor Pete Wilson prevented such partisan shenanigans during the last redistricting. Gray Davis poses no constraint to the radically left-wing Legislature elected in 1998.) Proponents of Proposition 24 feared that a gerrymander led by John Burton, Sheila Kuehl, Antonio Villaraigosa, *et al.* would institutionalize Democrat control of the California Legislature and even jeopardize the slim GOP majority in Congress.

Proposition 24 would also have provided for other limitations on legislative power and privileges, such as cutting the pay of state legislators (to \$75,000 a year), regulating their *per diem* travel and living expense reimbursement, withholding their pay for failure to submit a timely budget, and making all future pay raises subject to voter approval. Polls showed 24 struck a chord with the public, which understandably feels increasingly disenfranchised from the political process. More than one million voters signed petitions to qualify Proposition 24 for the ballot. Polling numbers suggested that the Republican Party stood a good chance of averting a gerrymander that would distort and diminish democracy. Proposition 24 could have gone a long way toward restoring public confidence in the political system, reducing cynicism and distrust toward politicians, and in the process saving the GOP in California from a rigged electoral process. And Proposition 24 might have been a powerful civics lesson, precisely the type of reformist measure the Progressive Movement had in mind when it championed the initiative device.

BUT THEN Proposition 24 ran into Ron George. George undoubtedly recalled the wrath visited on his predecessor, Malcolm Lucas, when, in 1991, the California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 140, which imposed legislative term limits: The Legislature threatened to cut the Supreme Court's budget the following year in retaliation! George has no stomach for that type of un-

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