

Keep the charter

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Good old deja vu is making a comeback. Yes, Jerry Brown is leading the Democratic field for governor in the June 2010 election. He could even win the whole moonbeam and be governor again. He served as California's 34th governor from 1975-1983. His official gubernatorial portrait appears in this space below.

We only mention this because he was governor the last time there was a vacancy to be filled on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. There not being a charter to specify otherwise, Brown appointed a liberal Democrat to fill the seat let vacant by the death of Supervisor Ray Lawyer. He appointed Lloyd Kutter, whose photo appears down below the portrait of the governor who appointed him. Kutter had worked on one of John Garamendi's numerous campaigns and was on the Democratic Central Committee here.

Kutter was a nice person, even if a little naive. He also took positions that were out of step with his conservative constituents, though he stood for a special election for the final two years of the unexpired term against Joe Flynn not long after Kutter was appointed and beat Flynn by nine votes. Flynn asked for a recount and then lost by 11 votes in 1976.

Among the misguided things Kutter did was endorse a ballot measure that would have reopened the county hospital, which was a dingy place with a bunch of dilapidated and out of date X-ray equipment. It would have been a huge burden on the county General Fund and would have interfered with the expansion of the private, non-profit Marshall Hospital, which has done an outstanding job for western El Dorado County at no cost to the county government.

At the regular election in 1978 Joe Flynn easily beat incumbent Kutter.

Flash forward to after El Dorado County voters approved a county Charter, a concept urged on by the late Supervisor Mark Nielsen. In April 2005 Supervisor Carl Borelli died and a special election, as specified by the Charter, was held in July to decide who would complete his term. Jack Sweeney won that election. His knowledge of county government and the issues have been invaluable and his conservative politics reflect the majority of his constituents.

Had the opening been left to fill by the governor there's no telling who would have been appointed or if anyone would have been appointed before the next election. We'll grant that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger made some good judicial appointments in El Dorado County, but it took him forever to do it.

The point is that it is better to control our own destiny than to let whoever is governor make a replacement appointment. The Charter provides for the unexpected. A number of Charter Committee members were ready to chuck it all and let the governor fill vacancies on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. That is shortsighted. Jerry Brown may well be the next governor and he wouldn't delay making an appointment like Schwarzenegger did. The county Charter is a valuable document that can be tweaked but must be kept.