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Ad watch: Prop. 77 ad focuses on judges

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The first television volley against Proposition 77 is due this weekend, with a 30-second spot scheduled to run on stations statewide. Paul Hefner, a spokesman for the No on 77 campaign, said the spot will run through the Nov. 8 election. The measure would shift from the Legislature to a panel of retired judges the task of redrawing congressional, legislative and Board of Equalization lines. Following is the text and a description of the ad with an analysis by Jim Sanders of The Bee Capitol Bureau:

IMAGES: The ad shows three men in robes creating a giant jigsaw puzzle, first by cutting up California and then reassembling the pieces into a finished product shaped like Texas.

* **ANNOUNCER:** Stop Prop. 77 - the politicians' power grab. It's a bad idea for three retired judges, handpicked by politicians, to redistrict for 37 million Californians.

Prop. 77 gives too much power, and too big a job, to three retired judges who aren't elected by the people, aren't accountable to the people and can't possibly represent the whole state.

And Prop. 77 changes our constitution for political gain. No on Prop. 77. Stop the power grab.

ANALYSIS: The ad hammers home a central theme of the No on 77 campaign - that the initiative is a power play, supported by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, to weaken Democrats' majority in the Assembly, Senate and congressional delegation.

Use of white men in the spot reinforces state statistics showing that nearly 90 percent of retired state judges are white.

It's no coincidence that the jigsaw puzzle ends up shaped like Texas, where Congressman Tom DeLay - who faces criminal charges of breaking campaign-finance laws - helped engineer a mid-decade redistricting to solidify Republican gains.

But nobody knows precisely what effect Proposition 77 would have on each political party.

Passage of the measure would not likely shift the political balance of power from Democrats to Republicans.

Most political districts tilt solidly Democratic or Republican and could not easily be altered to ensure competitive races.

Accusations of a "power grab" stem partly from the fact that the pro-Prop. 77 campaign is financed primarily by Republicans and business interests.

The Rose Institute, which has been aligned with Republican redistricting in decades past, concluded that Proposition 77 would produce an additional 11 competitive seats in the Legislature and 10 in Congress.

Democratic leaders have contested the Rose Institute's findings. But Bruce Cain, a redistricting expert who was involved in Democratic remapping efforts in the 1980s, said the institute's conclusions appear to be reasonable, based on his own research.

The ad also suggests the proposed process is not accountable to the people, but Proposition 77 requires the judges' maps to be approved by voters.

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