

Sentinel 10/5/05

AS WE SEE IT

Vote in favor of redistricting

PROPOSITION 77:

It's not perfect,
but it's better than what's in place.

We're skeptical of most voter initiatives. As a rule, the measures generally don't make the best laws, because they haven't gone through the important give and take that goes on during the legislative process.

And our skepticism is particularly strong this year, as eight measures are on the off-year, Nov. 8 state ballot.

In a state that just seems to lose more money, a special election seems like a waste.

However, there's at least one measure that we support this year: Proposition 77, the redistricting initiative.

It's not the perfect measure. It will not achieve the kind of basic reform that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger originally called for when he was elected back in 2003.

But it does take aim at a Legislature that pushed through an irresponsible and cynical redistricting plan that served incumbents' interests and not the general public.

Look no further than Santa Cruz County. Because of narrow politically expedient interests, Santa Cruz County has been left without the kind of representation in the state Senate that it had enjoyed for decades before. Santa Cruz County is represented in the Senate by two different senators — one a Republican and one a Democrat — whose districts largely reside outside of Santa Cruz County.

Opponents of Proposition 77 are portraying the measure as some sort of anti-Democratic party power grab. But the truth is that California will remain solidly in control of the

Democrats. And in the case of Santa Cruz County, the redistricting hurt local Democrats far more than it did Republicans.

As a practical matter, former assemblyman and current county Treasurer Fred Keeley, a Democrat, would be serving in the Senate today. But he was essentially redistricted out of the running, because Senate leaders decided that the heavily Democratic registration here could guarantee a party win in a Santa Clara County and San Mateo County district.

Proposition 77 is hardly the final answer. And we agree with critics that it has its flaws. The measure would turn over redistricting powers to a panel of retired judges. True, they would have little or no accountability to the voters. But the fact is that the state Legislature has messed up so badly that we think the power to redistrict should be taken away from them.

Just take a look at the arguments in this year's Official Voter Information Guide. Those writing the arguments against Proposition 77 filled their pages with half-truths and misleading comments. They argue: "Every time they don't get their way, politicians cook up new schemes to change the rules."

That claim is just not true. This measure is not about handing over power to the minority Republican party. It is about the kind of gerrymandering that has left Santa Cruz County without a representative in the state Senate. No one could make a solid argument as to why Santa Cruz should be sliced up; they did it for narrow, self-serving political interests.

Another comment in the ballot argument says that "two courts and three judges have already ruled that this measure shouldn't be on the ballot." That's a half truth. What's true is that the courts ruled against including the measure because of technical problems and a difference between petitions that went out to be signed and the ones that ended up being submitted to the secretary of state.

But the argument implies that the judges found something wrong with the content of the measure. And that implication is false.

In short, legislators had their chance to implement fair redistricting and they failed. Proposition 77 isn't a perfect solution, but we'd suggest any process at all before giving the responsibility back to legislators. They don't deserve the power.

We recommend a "yes" vote on Proposition 77.