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## **GOP Lawyers Lay Plan to Push Governor on Judge Appointments**

*Group to Form 'Mini-JNE Commission,' but Administration Spokesperson Says No Shift in Policy*

By KENNETH OFGANG, Staff Writer

Republican lawyers intend to form a "Min-JNE Commission" to push Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to appoint more GOP members to judgeships, an organizer of the effort said Friday.

Adam Abrahms, a Proskauer Rose associate who is chairman of the Los Angeles County chapter of the California Republican Lawyers Association, said he expects the association to appoint the commission by March 17.

The goal of the process is to bring about the appointment of "judges who will better reflect the views of mainstream Californians," Abrahms told the MetNews.

The effort is an outgrowth of a resolution, unanimously approved at the Republican state convention in San Jose recently, calling on Schwarzenegger to appoint more Republican judges. It also reflects conversations by CRLA members with Schwarzenegger's deputy chief of staff, Dan Dunmoyer, at the convention, Abrahms said.

### **Party Breakdown**

A spokesperson for the governor, Julie Soderlund, said that Schwarzenegger has appointed 68 Republicans, 46 Democrats, and 16 independents to judgeships since taking office. That is a strong departure from the past, Abrahms said, estimating that prior governors of both parties have made about 90 percent of judicial appointments from within the ranks of their own parties.

The disparity in Schwarzenegger's case may stem from his stated policy of not inquiring into judicial appointees' party affiliations until after the appointments are made. That policy is not going to change, Soderlund said.

Dunmoyer's meeting with the CRLA, she said, was no different than the types of outreach the administration does with other groups seeking to expand the pool of qualified applicants for judicial and executive branch appointments.

"The governor has been focused on the most qualified judges to the bench," Soderlund said. "His record ..speaks for itself."

Abrahms, who noted that he does not expect to be a member of the commission and has no interest in seeking a judgeship himself, said the commission's initial mission would be to "find qualified Republican judicial candidates and help them be presented to the governor's office at the appropriate time."

While the CRLA believes it has a "handshake commitment" from the

administration to “look at our candidates in a serious way,” Abrahms said, there remains a serious, unresolved issue—whether the names of persons being seriously considered for appointment will be submitted to the group before they go to the JNE Commission.

Dunmoyer did, however, promise to work with the group to get them information ahead-of-time on locations of vacancies, Abrahms said.

Abrahms emphasized that his group was neither “claiming a right to control [the governor’s appointment] decisions,” nor saying that he should only appoint Republican judges. But the group that met with Dunmoyer expressed concern regarding certain specific appointees, he said.

#### **‘What Was Done Was Done’**

While he declined to name names Friday—“we agreed [with Dunmoyer] that what was done was done,” Abrahms explained—he suggested that the governor should be more interested in appointing candidates “who prosecute...criminals and have an ‘R’ after their names,” rather than those who “fight the death penalty and have a ‘D’ after their names.”

The issue is not merely partisan, he explained, but ideological. “The goal is to get more highly qualified judges who believe in the things that we as Republicans believe,” including tougher criminal sentencing and “making the state open for business again,” Abrahms said.

One leading Republican activist, former California GOP Executive Director Jon Fleischman, Friday set up a post-convention scorecard on his blog, flashreport.org. He noted that the governor’s only appointee since the convention, John Laettner, a career prosecutor named to the Contra Costa Superior Court, is a Republican.

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