

RRSC. Pol + Gov

Smith's Seat

The 'Vultures' Emerg^{10/22/78}ed Early

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Politicking for the Watsonville supervisorial seat vacated by the death of Cecil Smith Jr. Tuesday began while he lay stricken with a heart attack — five days before his demise.

"It was a vulture's scene," a state official told The Sentinel.

Analysis

He said the charge was not meant to indict candidates now emerging — either by their own activities or placed in competition by the press — "but it was unbelievable that there were people seeking the office at that time."

The replacement will be determined by the governor; if the appointment is made prior to January, it will be necessary that the appointment be made for the remaining months of Smith's first term, ending in January, and for two years of his second term, 1979-80.

An election for the seat will be held in 1980 for the remaining two years of the term.

The 1980 election will put four of the five board seats up for contest: Aptos, San Lorenzo Valley-Scotts Valley, Live Oak-Soquel and Watsonville.

Santa Cruz County is familiar with Gov. Brown's supervisorial appointments process.

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In 1975, the county survived such an event when Supervisor Pat Liteky resigned the Fifth District seat.

It took the governor four months to the day and involved the political activity of as many as 50 applicants — over 40 more than were willing to run in the 1972 primary.

In that selection process, the Democratic Central Committee held two hearings that encouraged the petitioning of more than 20 applicants. The committee came up with three nominations.

Gov. Brown chose none of the three, but came up with Ed Borovatz — the man who most people felt was the fourth-in-line choice of the committee. Borovatz lost the seat in a recall election in June.

While the appointment process at the state level is secret, the press learned in 1975 that Gov. Brown's office repeatedly asked candidates if they were willing to run for re-election.

During the last days of that process, the governor reached outside the list of applicants and asked at least one other person to consider the appointment.

That man, Dave Weiss, said he told the governor he would not guarantee that he would seek re-election. He did not get the appointment.

It was ironic then, as the Democrats and others having influence insisted that local applicants state they were not interested in running for re-election, as the incumbency carries an advantage into the popular election.

Press accounts at the time called the appointment process "puzzling and mystical."

One man who probably will have influence on the appointment is Democratic As-

semblyman Henry Mello of Watsonville.

According to his aide, Stephanie Hauk, "We expect the appointments office will screen the list down to three or so and then ask for Assemblyman Mello's recommendation."

She said Mello is already being approached, but that his office is directing persons to Brown's appointments secretary, Carlotta Mellon.

Mellon kept the lid on Brown's appointment of Borovatz until the last day, but made the mistake of calling one potential candidate while the press was present to tell him that he had not been chosen. The story on the appointment was on newstands before Borovatz knew he had become a supervisor.

Most political observers feel that Brown's appointment will be more moderate than would be expected in the first two years of his tenure.

Recent press articles have named nearly every official in the Watsonville area as a potential petitioner for the seat, and a few Chicano leaders and Cecil Smith III, the son of the deceased supervisor.

A standing joke around the County Center is that a couple of out-of-office politicians have moved to Watsonville in the past couple of days.

Two of Smith's colleagues on the board, Marilyn Liddicoat and Pat Liberty, stated they hoped the governor would appoint someone close to Smith's political philosophy. The two, along with Smith and Supervisor Dan Forbus, made up a four-member conservative majority on the board.

"But, as everyone knows," Hauk said, "the governor is very independent in making his appointments."

"We're just hoping that he will make it as quickly as possible," she said.