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Politics

GOP leaders demand answer

Republicans say the governor must explain why he named a Democrat as his chief of staff.

By [Gabe Delsohn](#) -- Bee Capitol Bureau

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Leaders of the California Republican Party, still smarting over Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's choice of a longtime Democrat as his new chief of staff, have demanded a meeting with Schwarzenegger - and an explanation.

"We disagree with the decision," Duf Sundheim, party chairman, said Tuesday. "We thought it would be beneficial to meet with the governor so he can explain to us in person what he did."

Schwarzenegger infuriated scores of Republicans last week when he chose Susan Kennedy, a former Cabinet secretary to recalled Gov. Gray Davis, as a replacement for outgoing Chief of Staff Pat Clarey, a moderate Republican.

In addition to having worked for Davis, Kennedy is an abortion-rights activist and a former executive director of the state Democratic Party.

"I'm pretty strongly against it," Keith Carlson, a lawyer in Irvine

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and GOP board member, said of Kennedy's appointment. "The spirit of the recall was to oust Davis and his cronies, and now one of his cronies is back."

At a press conference when he announced the appointment, Schwarzenegger said Kennedy promised to put aside her Democratic "philosophy" and work to implement his vision and policies.

The next day, Schwarzenegger called a conservative talk radio show in San Diego specifically, he said, to reassure his supporters about the appointment.

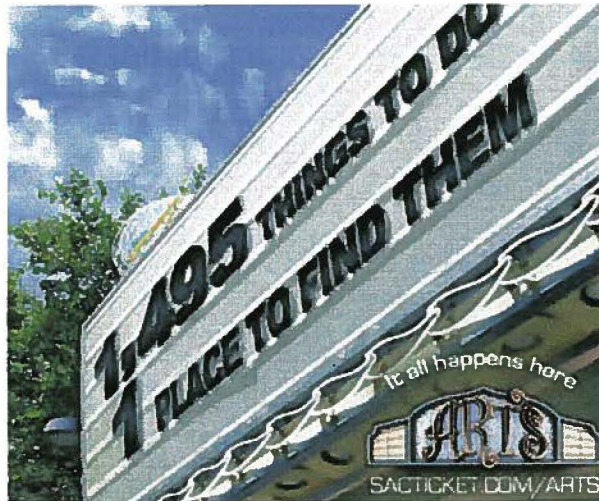
But angry party leaders were not mollified. After a telephone conference call Friday, the board decided to request a meeting with the Republican governor. Schwarzenegger has agreed to meet with the Republican Party's 21-member board next Thursday in his office at the Capitol, Schwarzenegger communications director Rob Stutzman said.

Assemblyman Ray Haynes, R-Murrieta, a member of the conservative California Republican Assembly, wrote a piece Monday on the organization's Web site that suggested conservatives felt permanently scorned by Kennedy's appointment. He also took strong exception to administration comments that Kennedy's appointment was a bold move by an unconventional governor.

"I'll be real blunt," Haynes said in an interview Tuesday. "This was not a bold move. This was a chicken move. This was a move of capitulation."

Kennedy, who doesn't officially start working for Schwarzenegger until January, declined to comment Tuesday about the GOP's concerns.

Stutzman said conservatives are overreacting and he predicted the bad feelings would disappear quickly.



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"What I caution my fellow Republicans on, particularly the conservatives, is to judge the governor by how he governs. This is still the governor who repealed a \$4 billion (car) tax, (has) driven the state back to solvency without raising taxes and helped create thousands of new jobs."

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Sundheim said board members wanted to ask Schwarzenegger directly about how Kennedy's appointment may affect his future policy agenda. They're also very concerned about the more practical matter of how she can work with the party as it tries to help get Schwarzenegger elected again next year.

For one thing, the chief of staff or a designee usually sits in on Republican Party board meetings. With an election coming up, issues such as campaign strategy as well as get-out-the-vote and volunteer efforts would be discussed.

Party officials are also expected to play a bigger role in campaign fundraising. With new limits on individual contributions enacted by voters under Proposition 34 in 2000, party officials say they expect to be much more involved in raising money for the governor's race than in past elections.

"We're getting a lot of calls from our members," said Shawn Steel, the party's former chairman and a board member. "This is not just one member upset. People are feeling disheartened, discouraged and a sense of betrayal."

Conservatives are watching closely to see who Schwarzenegger nominates, presumably by the end of the year, to the seat on the California Supreme Court vacated by Janice Brown, who was appointed to the federal bench by President Bush.

They're also waiting to see how Schwarzenegger rules in the next few days on the clemency request by condemned murderer Stanley "Tookie" Williams.

But while conservatives might be unhappy with Schwarzenegger and may even talk of running someone against him in the GOP primary next June, it's hard to see them abandoning him altogether, said Jaime Regalado, director of the Pat Brown Institute of Public Affairs in Los Angeles.

"We're still a year away from the election," Regalado said. "He has huge name recognition. He's done much of the bidding for the business community and for the right with some of his

statements about immigration. He can pull out those cards when he needs them."

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