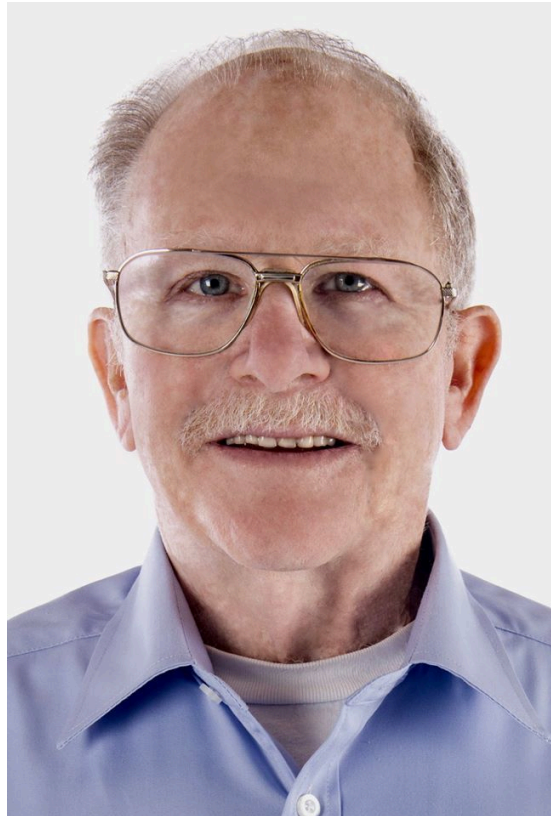


Supervisors call for special election to fill vacant seat

March 8, 2022



The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to call for a special election to fill the seat of Supervisor Bob Berkowitz, who died last week.

The vote gives those interested in running for the District 5 seat only days to collect signatures to get their names on the ballot. Due to state law, to be on the June primary election, signatures must be collected and all paperwork turned in by March 16.

By state law, Gov. Gavin Newsom will appoint a replacement to fill the vacant seat, and that could still happen. The person who wins the special election will take over once a final decision has been made by voters and will serve through the remainder of Berkowitz's term, which expires at the end of 2024.

To make things a little more confusing, the special election will be in the existing boundaries District 5, not the new boundaries recently adopted by supervisors.

County Counsel Joel Campbell-Blair told supervisors he was worked diligently to put together a resolution they could adopt. He said a special election would give voters a say in the fastest way.

It is the earliest available time for people in District 5 to choose their own supervisor and shorten the amount of time for an appointment of the state to serve,” Campbell-Blair said.

He explained if a candidate receives more than 50% of the vote in the June primary, that person could take the seat as soon as supervisor’s approve the vote count. If no candidate receives a majority of the vote in June, the top two vote getters would advance to the November 8 general election, after which the winner would be season.

During public comment, four speakers voiced their views on the issue, two saying they supported the idea of a special election and two others saying they were opposed to a rushed vote.

But the three supervisors at the meeting said they have heard overwhelmingly that the people want to decide who will take the seat.

“I’ve personally been bombarded with folks in District 5 who want to have this decision and not leave it up to the governor,” Supervisor Chris Howard said.

Howard also said the vote Tuesday was not rushed.

“I’m not sure how rushed it’s been,” he said. “It’s been on our radars for months, given the frequency of Supervisor Berkowitz’ missing meetings. I know there’s a lot of interest out there.”

Howard also said when discussing the issue with State Sen. Mike McGuire’s office, he learned the governor often takes quite a while before making an appointment.

“If you’re serious about wanting to serve this community, the people should have that choice on the ballot,” Howard said. “So I’m all about approving this resolution.”

Board Chair Gerry Hemmingsen said an election is the right way to choose a new supervisor.

“The purpose is all about having representation,” Hemmingsen said. “The people of District 5 have been without representation long enough. The fairest way is to put it out to vote, not to have one person decide who’s going to represent you.”

Supervisor Darrin Short also said he thinks a vote is the right way to go.

“I agree we are best served by allowing the people to make a decision,” Short said. “I’m sure the governor can’t dispute that as well. I think the governor would agree allowing the people to choose their own representation is the best way to go.”

Howard made a motion to approve the resolution calling for the special election with Short offering a second. The vote passed 3-0.

