Bully boy

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

The state government has been so dysfunctional for so long that it's typical for pundits to issue blanket condemnations of the Legislature, the unions or other institutions without assigning individual blame. That's unfortunate, because sometimes an individual is very responsible when something destructive, appalling or ridiculous occurs.

We're seeing just such an instance now in California's 12th Senate District, and the blame lies entirely with Senate President Don Perata, D-Oakland. Thanks to a recall ballot petition campaign orchestrated and partly funded by Perata, voters in the Central Valley district will soon be asked whether to recall Sen. Jeff Denham, R-Merced, who was re-elected in a 2006 landslide with 58 percent support.

Denham is not accused of any crime or linked to any scandal. His chief "mistake" was infuriating Perata last summer by refusing to support a state budget Denham considered highly irresponsible.

The contrast with the 2003 recall of Gov. Gray Davis could not be more distinct. Davis faced a bipartisan groundswell of disgust when it became apparent that he could no longer stand up to profligate politicians running the Legislature. Denham faces a strictly partisan hit job because he stood up to these profligate pols - even as his judgment about the deep problems with state finances has been borne out over and over in recent months.

But the petulant Perata - whose long history of bullying has included locking senators out of their offices for daring to appear at fundraisers he considers verboten - doesn't care if Denham has been vindicated by events. He just relishes his latest chance to play the tough guy.

The only good news here is that thanks to term limits, Perata's abusive reign is in its final months. It's safe to say he will not be missed.

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