

Lefever Again Asks Closing Of Gate On Matilija Dam

MAY 12, 1948

Robert Lefever once again stumped for the closing of the valve at Matilija dam when county flood control district supervisors met yesterday afternoon. Again, he fought the battle without cooperation from fellow board members, Lefever, as he has several members.

Midway in the flood control times in recent months, declared he wanted the valve shut down on the dam (at elevation 1050) so that more water could be stored in the reservoir as a means of testing the safety of the dam. He pointed out that Dr. Charles P. Berkey, consultant, and others have recommended that the dam storage be tested at stepped heights.

In particular, Lefever aimed his remarks at County Flood Control District Engineer Robert L. Ryan, who in the past wouldn't close the valve because state permission had not been received, because water users had demands upon the water flowing into the dam and for similar other reasons.

"I want the responsibility to be right where it should be if a flash flood comes and the dam goes out", Lefever declared.

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Lefever Wants Water In The Dam

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At that point, Ryan reminded Lefever that although the state has given permission for storage to elevation 1050 (storage is now at 1029), there are water right users to consider. Two groups of water users last weekend asked for the release of water and he was forced to turn loose all the water that is at present flowing into the dam—between four and a half and five and a half acre feet, Ryan informed Lefever.

ON RECORD

Lefever said, anyway, he wanted to be on record as favoring the closing of the valve, and so by motion he ordered the valve to be closed. His motion died for lack of a second.

Lester Price then explained to Lefever he felt there was no question but that all the supervisors wanted to see storage up to the 1050 elevation but he couldn't see how this could be done if riparian users were to be given their rights.

Lefever shot back with "they're the people I'm trying to protect."

DROPPED AGAIN

The matter once again was dropped—at least temporarily—after Ryan, with backing from District Attorney M. Arthur Waite, pointed out to Lefever that only one person would be criminally liable for closing of the valve: that would be Ryan. He said water right users aren't going to stand by and wait for water when they need it. He also told Lefever that he is trying to hold the current elevation of storage.

Lefever got off the last dig before the talk stopped by saying "it's too late now, but there has been three months to do it in."

The matter came up when a copy of a letter sent to the state division of dams by Ryan was read to the board. In the letter Ryan expressed doubt that storage of 1059 could be attained this summer.

BUTTS THE STATESMAN

SOMEbody remarked the other day that we have various laws, better-business-bureau supervision, and other forms of policing to insure that commercial advertising be honest and reasonably free from misrepresentation. However, the remark concluded, the sky is the limit in political advertising. There the advertiser may distort facts and misrepresent the situation to his heart's content. It's "just politics."

And, brother, some of them do.

Take Sanford Butts. In a campaign for reelection to the office of supervisor, he is painting his 16 years in that office as a triumph of statesmanship.

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For example, he four-laned highway No. 101 into the city! That is, the state highway department did it during the time he was holding a county office which had nothing to do with San Francisco-to-Los Angeles four-laning.

He brought down the tax rate. That is, assessed valuation went up during the last four years, so the tax rate had to come down unless the board went money-spending-crazy.

Etc., etc., etc., etc.

During his years in office, we fought a world war, passed the Taft-Hartley act, created the United Nations, and set in motion the Marshall plan. Maybe, Sanford Butts arranged them also.

AND—most marvelous of all—he opposed the Warren Matilija dam program. So he says now, a year after all the trouble developed.

Butts bases this fancy bit of advertising on the fact that the board minutes show he voted against the hiring of Engineer Warren ON DEC. 18, 1945. He voted against him on that occasion, so he explained at the time, only in order that the views of the advisory board first might be heard.

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To be brutally frank, the history of that whole first year and a quarter of the Warren regime shows a tight little, highly unanimous deal. Butts, Cook, and the other three supervisors then in office, together with Warren, ran the whole show as congenial and happy and united as six little peas in a pod. Never a harsh word among them in those honeymoon days.

And never a willingness to have any consultants called in! It was during that time the blunders were made, the snowball of high costs set rolling.

Butts "went along" with everything. They all "went along."

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And so we have today a White Elephant (cost so far about \$2,800,000), practically nothing in the way of water development to show for it, and a community scandal of reckless spending by men who simply did not know what they were doing.

Worst of all, perhaps, is the bankruptcy of ideas. The whole project, of course, is stalled. Sanford Butts has no more notion today of any plan whereby Zone 1's water needs can be really met than has any blue-eyed kitten. Nor, we think, has Russell Cook.

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The future of this vital development requires new brains, a new viewpoint, on the board. The community's self-respect and integrity demand a change.

Pipedreams and empty boasts may "get by" in a political ad. The people of Zone 1 demand, or certainly should demand, something more in the two supervisors who now must shoulder the heavy water problem. They should demand business capacity, honesty, and a willingness and ability to meet responsibility.