

## Why attempts to recall state lawmakers are rare

*Republicans are trying to get Democrats in California and Nevada thrown out of office. Most recall elections, though, are only successful at the local level.*

BY ALAN GREENBLATT

Republicans in California recognize that they can't defeat all the Democrats in the state legislature, or even a majority of them. That's the reason they've targeted just one state senator in particular.

Last year, Democrat Josh Newman narrowly won a state Senate seat representing a district outside Los Angeles that had previously been held by a Republican. Not long after taking office, he voted in favor of a gas tax increase. As a result — and because he represents a swing district — Newman has been targeted for a recall. “I call it the gazelle strategy,” says Carl DeMaio, a former San Diego City Council member, who is leading the recall effort. “Lions don't go after all the gazelles, they work together to take down the weakest, slowest one. Let's think like a lion and use the recall process to pick off one member, their weakest member.”

DeMaio has raised more than \$1 million to support the effort. The legislature attempted to stop it, passing a law raising the bar for recall requirements, but that action has been blocked by the courts.

The amount of effort it takes to recall a single legislator helps explain why the tactic is relatively rare. Most recalls occur at the local level, where it's easier to get a limited number of voters angry about an official's missteps. Flint, Mich., Mayor Karen Weaver, for instance, faces a recall election this month — not because of her handling of the city's water crisis, but because of a garbage contract.

At the state level, recalls represent a lot of expense for potentially limited rewards. Most legislative majorities, after all, don't turn on control of a single seat. “Part of the reason we don't see this that often is that most of the time, it doesn't pay,” says Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at Wagner College in New York and editor of the Recall Elections Blog. “You need a value play to it, so you're not just winning a seat but gaining an overarching political value.”

In Nevada, the signature collection process is just winding down for recall efforts against three state senators, all of them Democrats. Democrats hold a one-seat majority in the chamber, so if two of the senators are ousted, the GOP will take control. The campaign against each is being handled by Hutchison & Steffen, a Las Vegas law firm where GOP Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchison is a partner. “It's purely a partisan play,” says Jon Ralston, editor of The Nevada Independent, “because Republicans have no hope of winning the Senate in 2018.”

Republicans in California know their state is one of the few in the nation where they have no chance of regaining a legislative majority. Knocking off Newman, however, would be enough to erase the Democrats' two-thirds majority in the state Senate, depriving the party of its ability to raise taxes on its own. “He's absolutely beatable,” DeMaio says. “As soon as voters get a chance, they're going to throw his ass out of office.”