

El Dorado's political drama comes to climax Tues.

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

The questions linger after a tumultuous political and legal drama in El Dorado County. They dangle amid the clutter of campaign signs on hillsides along Highway 50 and beneath Ponderosa pines on back-country roads.

What is the mood of this county after a veteran supervisor, Ray Nutting, was put on trial and stripped from office in what supporters called a political prosecution? What are the challenges of this Sierra foothills region, the birthplace of the Gold Rush, where grass-roots revolts now roil over a proposed residential development boom?

On Tuesday, voters will choose among six candidates in an extraordinary special election to replace Nutting. The winner will take office immediately and serve out the last two years and four months of the former District 2 supervisor's term.

The candidates include his wife, Jennifer Nutting, owner of a Pollock Pines hair salon and an outspoken critic of what she claims is a county culture of political bullying that led to her husband's prosecution.

Ray Nutting, 54, a four-term county supervisor, was acquitted on three felony counts for failing to properly disclose more than \$70,000 in state income he received for brush-clearing on the family's 340-acre timber ranch in Somerset. But a judge ordered him expelled from office June 6 because of misdemeanor convictions for improperly raising \$55,000 in bail money from two county employees and a construction contractor doing business with the county.

Now the other special election candidates – winery owner Dave

Pratt, manufacturing executive Claire McNeal, automotive shop owner George Turnboo, database systems consultant Chris Amaral and Web hosting company owner Shiva Frentzen – are trying to refocus the election to matters other than the Nutting saga.

Read the whole story