

John T. Knox: The good old days when the GOP could endorse a Dem



Governor Ronald Reagan signs legislation with Assemblyman John T. Knox, second from right, and son John H. Knox. At left is Knox's friend, Republican Senator Bob Beverly. (Courtesy of John H. Knox)

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RICHMOND — John T. Knox, who spent 20 years in the California Assembly and whose name is attached to several landmark laws and structures, died April 3 in Richmond at age 92. As Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia pointed out in the newspaper, “There is a reason things are named after him; he got things done.”

Something unusual that he accomplished: “Jack” Knox was nominated by both the Democrats and the Republicans — the latter by write-in votes — for the Assembly elections in both 1974 and in 1976.

Politicos with that kind of a reputation usually work well with their colleagues across the aisle. And liberal Democrat Knox was recognized for that when, in 1976, he was elected by both the Democratic and Republican Assembly contingents as Speaker Pro Tem.

The Republicans must have been happy with their 1974 write-in vote, because two years later the Martinez-based group Republicans United for John T. Knox called for the Richmond Democrat to be nominated again.

A June 3, 1976, letter addressed to “Dear Republican Voters” noted that no one from their party filed to run against Knox to represent the 11th Assembly District, which at that time was most of West Contra Costa County. “This makes it possible then for registered Republicans to choose a candidate in the (June 8) primary elections via the write-in route,” the letter said.

The three-page letter listed Knox’s attributes — “the most fiscally responsible member of the Assembly,” his “outstanding leadership in protecting the environment,” others — and said such qualities warranted keeping the Democrat in office.

“This means we must rise above narrow partisan considerations,” said the letter, which John H. Knox, the Assemblyman’s son, recently shared. It might even become a museum exhibit one day, a memento from a more innocent era; when’s the last time you heard operatives of one major political party endorse electing someone from the other side?