

## Too much democracy?

One of the more unusual arguments against the recall of Gov. Gray Davis is that Californians should oppose the Oct. 7 vote because America is a republic, not a direct democracy. As such, Americans should only vote in normally scheduled elections and eschew efforts to directly pass legislation or overturn legislative decisions or previous votes.

It's an interesting argument, especially from liberal Democrats who can always be counted on to support direct democracy when it expands government spending. The hypocrisy aside, the matter is worth at least some discussion.



America's framers conceived this nation as a republic. Instead of being ruled by the "mob," so to speak, the nation would be ruled by representatives.

It's a system of checks and balances, in which the public votes for representatives, and those representatives have limited areas in which they can govern. The executive branch is checked by the legislative branch and both are checked by the courts.

Foes of direct democracy see initiatives as a way for people to go around that process, and they fear that people will be ruled by passions rather than reason.

But direct democracy is not an assault on that system.

Recalls, referendums and initiatives are under the same legal and constitutional restraints as other laws and elections. In California's history, the public has generally used the process to restrict government rather than expand it, which suggests the people aren't as dumb as the experts think.

As Dane Waters of the Initiative and Referendum Institute argued in a recent Fox News discussion, Thomas Jefferson strongly supported the referendum process, which helps debunk the myth that this process goes against the founders' intent.

"The initiative process is not a replacement to representative government, was never designed to be. It is just a check and balance," Mr. Waters explained.

Gov. Hiram Johnson, a progressive Republican who pushed forward these measures, argued that recalls would check politicians who are corrupt or incompetent, and initiatives and referendums would enable the public to circumvent officials beholden to special interests.

"The opponents of direct legislation and the recall, however they may phrase their opposition, in reality believe the people cannot be trusted," said Gov. Johnson in his 1911 inaugural address. He argued that people who have the intelligence to elect

officials should be expected to have the intelligence to remove them from office.

That's a compelling point. But it leaves Gov. Davis with one less argument to forestall Arnold Schwarzenegger and Judgment Day.