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Messy politics are polluting The City's water system

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is supposed to be an independent body making decisions on the Bay Area's largest water supply system. So it was a sorry day when politics clogged up the spout.

The Board of Supervisors this week rejected a Hispanic activist for a spot on the panel because her nonprofit gets funding from PG&E, and then Richard Sklar, who used to head the agency and is by far the most knowledgeable person on the commission (and probably in its history) had to withdraw his name for consideration when it became certain that he wasn't going to get the votes.

This whole charade began after Mayor Gavin Newsom fired SFPUC chief Susan Leal earlier this year (with cries of backstabbing on both sides) and the focal point on the board became a lesson in payback against Newsom from Leal's supporters.

The SFPUC is far too important to be the backdrop for political games in San Francisco — the Peninsula gets most of its drinking water from the same source and its residents voted for the multibillion-dollar seismic retrofit of Hetch Hetchy. The petty squabbling at City Hall should never take precedent over the real purpose of the utilities commission — something not lost on state legislators who have contemplated taking control of the water system away from San Francisco for its often mindless politics.

The fact that some board members want to run our own power system is enough to make anyone reach for a drink.