

IN SEARCH OF A “PROGRESSIVE SUPERMAJORITY” ON THE SAN FRANCISCO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

A Working Paper

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Following the November-December 2000 Board of Supervisors district elections, there was much commentary (including by yours truly) on the new 8-member “progressive supermajority” (Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin and Sandoval) that the city’s voters had elected to office and that would rule the board starting in January 2001. Now that enough time has passed for board members to have accumulated a voting track record that can be analyzed, I decided to put the progressive supermajority hypothesis to a test as part of a larger research project.

Using the terrific reporting service provided by SFVoteWatch.com (click on Usual Suspects “Suspects Links”), I looked at all 398 non-unanimous full board votes taken on all legislation covering all topics during the period January 1, 2001 through October 3, 2002. I also identified and separately analyzed a subset of 158 of those votes (which I label “GEHH” votes) under the SFVoteWatch-defined topic headings of Growth, development and preservation; Energy and utilities; Homelessness and social welfare; and Housing and rent control. My reasoning was that, if a progressive supermajority exists, it would most likely be observed in board voting on GEHH-type issues, which were the most contested during the November-December district campaigns.

PATTERNS OF VOTING AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT ON THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Table 1 reports each supervisor’s average percent agreement with the other 10 BOS members in voting on ALL legislation and GEHH-type legislation during the period of study.

(To illustrate interpretation, Ammiano’s average percent voting agreement score of 73.5 under “ALL” is the average of his percent voting agreement scores with each of the other 10 supervisors, which range from 51.6% agreement with Hall to 89.4% agreement with McGoldrick in voting on all proposed legislation during this period. See the detailed voting agreement scores for Ammiano and other BOS members in the Appendix “Breakdown” at the end of this paper.)

TABLE 1: Each Supervisor's Average Percent Agreement with other 10 BOS Members in Voting on Proposed Legislation January 1, 2001 through October 3, 2002 – Non-Unanimous Full Board Votes

Average % Agreement

Jan 1, 2001–Oct 3, 2002

with Other 10 BOS Members

in Voting on:

Name	All Legislation	GEHH * Legislation	(Old) District	District PVI **
Ammiano	73.5	74.1	9	81
Daly	59.4	64.8	6	74
Gonzalez	58.9	65.2	5	77
Hall	52.7	46.5	7	33
Leno	74.4	76.9	8	66
Maxwell	74.1	76.7	10	51
McGoldrick	73.3	74.0	1	47
Newsom	66.3	61.6	2	37
Peskin	72.7	76.2	3	52
Sandoval	68.1	72.0	11	41
Yee	56.1	56.6	4	30
No. of Votes:	398	158		

* GEHH = Growth, Development, & Preservation; Energy & Utilities; Homelessness & Social Welfare; Housing & Rent Control.

** Progressive Voting Index (See DeLeon Index, Usual Suspects.)

Note 1: For purposes of computing the agreement scores for "all" legislation, I counted the identical BOS votes on 39 separate labor contracts in June 2002 as one board vote.

Note 2: In computing the agreement score for any pair of BOS members, I omitted board votes in which one or the other member was absent or recused.

Roll call vote data source: SFVoteWatch.com.

Based on the evidence of Table 1, Supervisors Leno and Maxwell were the most likely to vote in harmony with the other supervisors, and Hall and Yee were the least likely. Even on the presumably most divisive GEHH issues, however, the average voting agreement scores range from 46.5% to 76.9%, indicating a rather higher level of overall agreement among the supervisors than one might expect given the progressive supermajority hypothesis. (If board members polarized consistently 8 to 3 in voting on all GEHH issues in line with the progressive supermajority hypothesis, then Hall, Yee and Newsom would have average agreement scores of 20% and the remaining 8 supervisors would have average agreement scores of 70%.)

Many factors might explain why some supervisors score relatively low and others relatively high on this overall voting agreement index. One key factor, in my opinion, is the ideological character of the district each supervisor represents. Specifically, the more extremely conservative or extremely progressive a supervisor's district, the less likely that supervisor is to vote in harmony with his or her colleagues on the board; the more ideologically centrist or moderate a supervisor's district, the more likely that supervisor is to vote in agreement with most other colleagues on the board. By this line of reasoning, if one were to plot each supervisor's average percent voting agreement score against the level of progressivism in his or her district, one would expect to see an upside-down "U" pattern, with lowest agreement scores at the low and high ends of district progressivism and highest agreement scores in the middle range of that scale. If we use district scores on my Progressive Voting Index (PVI) as a plausible measure of "progressivism," that inverted-U pattern is exactly what we find. See Figure 1.

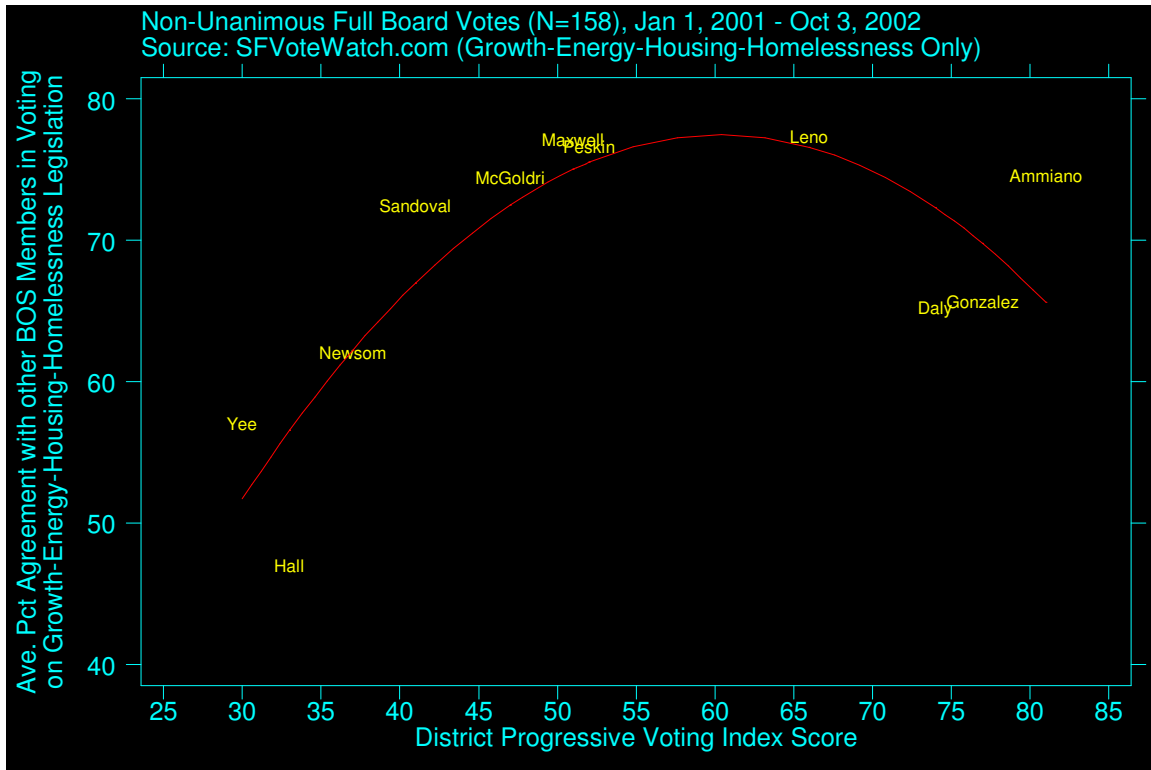


Figure 1: Inverted “U” relationship between a supervisor’s average voting agreement score on GEHH legislation and his or her district’s Progressive Voting Index score.

(Model fit: $Y = -24.3 + 3.369 * X - .028 * X\text{-sq}$. $P < .01$, $R\text{-sq} = .68$.)

Interpretation: Supervisors who represent more ideologically extreme districts (very low PVI and very high PVI) tend to have lower average voting agreement scores on GEHH types of issues. Those who represent more centrist or moderate districts tend to have higher average voting agreement scores. As shown in the graph, the average voting agreement score for Sup. Ammiano is much higher than it “should” be given a very high District 9 PVI of 81 – an anomaly possibly explained by the fact that Sup. Ammiano is the board president, has an extremely safe seat in District 9, and is also a candidate for mayor in 2003.

SOME GRAPHICAL ANALYSES OF VOTING “BLOCS” ON THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS.

In my analysis of non-unanimous full board votes, I observed relatively few “pure” splits between a hypothesized progressive supermajority (Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin, and Sandoval) voting as a bloc against a moderate-conservative minority (Hall, Newsom, and Yee). Focusing only on full board votes where all 11 supervisors actually voted, I found that only 7% of 268 board votes on “all”

legislation produced this polarized 8-3 split, and only 13% of the 114 board votes on GEHH legislation did so. By this strict definition of a progressive supermajority, therefore, a progressive supermajority does not exist – or, more precisely, it materializes only rarely in a small handful of full board votes.

If we work with a lower threshold of polarization, however, we may find that most members of each hypothesized voting bloc vote the same way together on most issues most of the time and vote the opposite of most members of the other voting bloc on most issues most of the time.

There are many different statistical and graphical methods, ranging from crude to sophisticated, that might be used to detect these more loosely defined voting blocs, if they exist, in roll call vote data like this. The graphical method chosen here is crude but nonetheless illuminating. I ran this graphical analysis two ways, first by using an Ammiano-Newsom space (Figures 2A and 2B), and second by using a Daly-Hall space (Figures 3A and 3B). What I mean by “space” should be made clear from the graphs displayed and the following discussion below.

Graphical Voting Bloc Analysis in Ammiano-Newsom Political Space:

Figure 2A (ALL legislation) plots the scores of 9 supervisors on two scales, % voting agreement with Ammiano on the left scale and % voting agreement with Newsom on the bottom scale. As can be seen in the graph, McGoldrick, Peskin, Maxwell and Leno all score very high voting agreement with Ammiano AND high voting agreement with Newsom. Daly and Gonzalez score only moderately high agreement with Ammiano and the lowest agreement with Newsom. Hall and Yee score moderately high agreement with Newsom and the lowest agreement with Ammiano. Sandoval scores about midway between the McGoldrick et al bloc and the Daly-Gonzalez bloc in voting agreement with Ammiano, and also roughly the same middle position between those two blocs in voting agreement with Newsom.

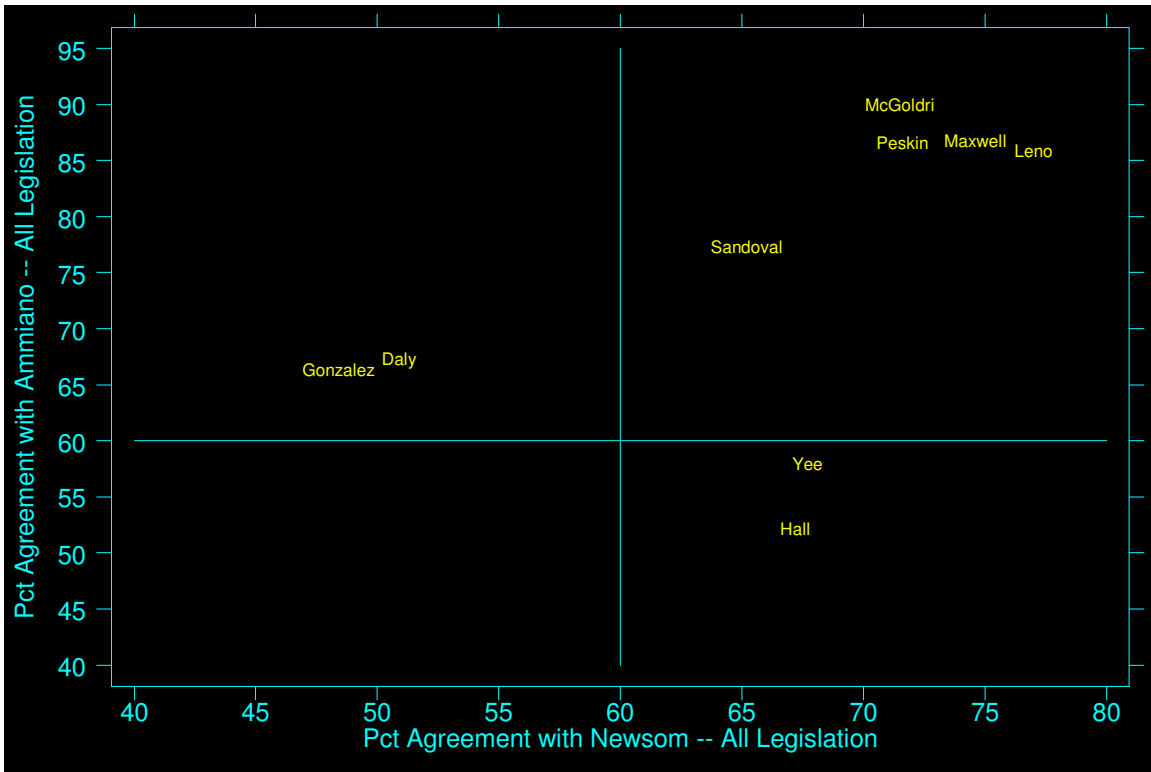


Figure 2A

Compared with Figure 2A, Figure 2B (GEHH legislation) shows considerable convergence of McGoldrick, Peskin, Maxwell, Leno, Sandoval, Daly and Gonzalez toward voting agreement with Ammiano on GEHH issues (although Daly & Gonzalez remain a distinct bloc), while Yee and Hall both show more disagreement with Ammiano and (in Yee's case) more agreement with Newsom on these kinds of issues.

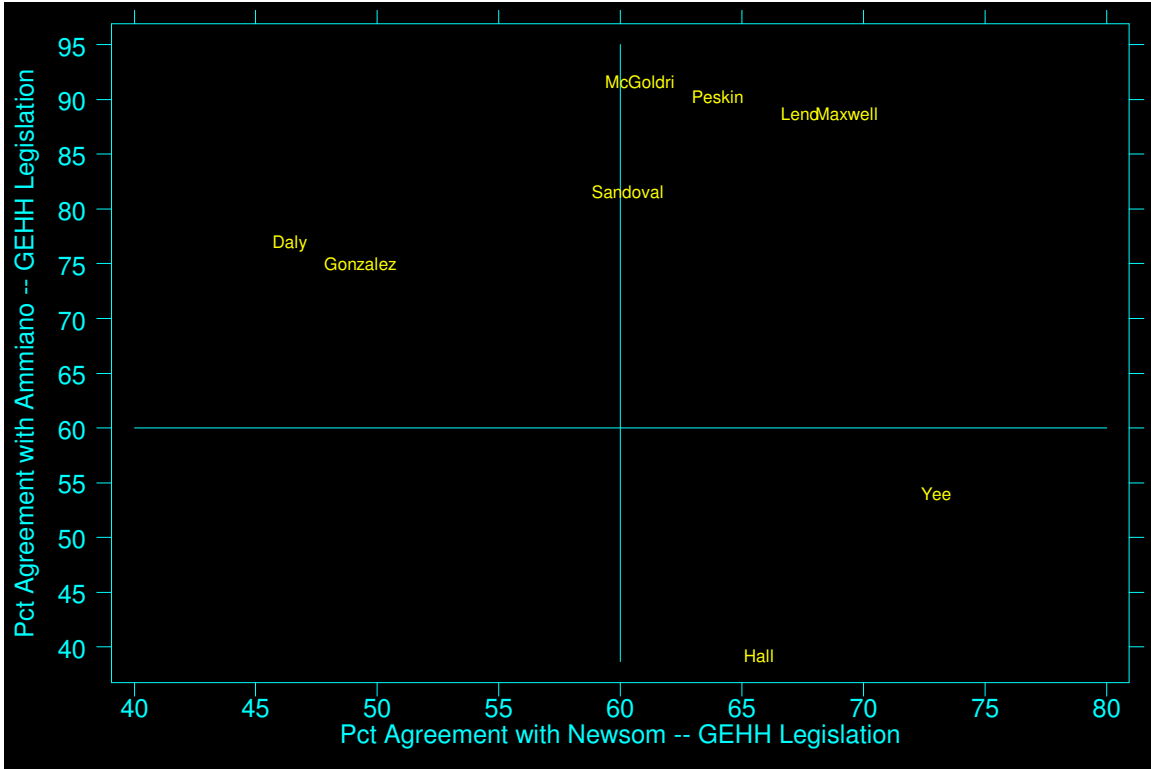


Figure 2B

Graphical Voting Bloc Analysis in Daly-Hall Political Space:

Figure 3A (ALL legislation) plots the scores of 9 supervisors on two scales, % voting agreement with Daly on the left scale and % voting agreement with Hall on the bottom scale. As can be seen in the graph, Sandoval, Ammiano, McGoldrick, Peskin, Leno and Maxwell all form a loose cluster in the top center (moderate voting agreement with Hall, fairly high voting agreement with Daly). Yee and Newsom cluster at the bottom right of the graph showing fairly high voting agreement with Hall and low agreement with Daly. Gonzalez stands alone with the highest voting agreement with Daly and lowest agreement with Hall.

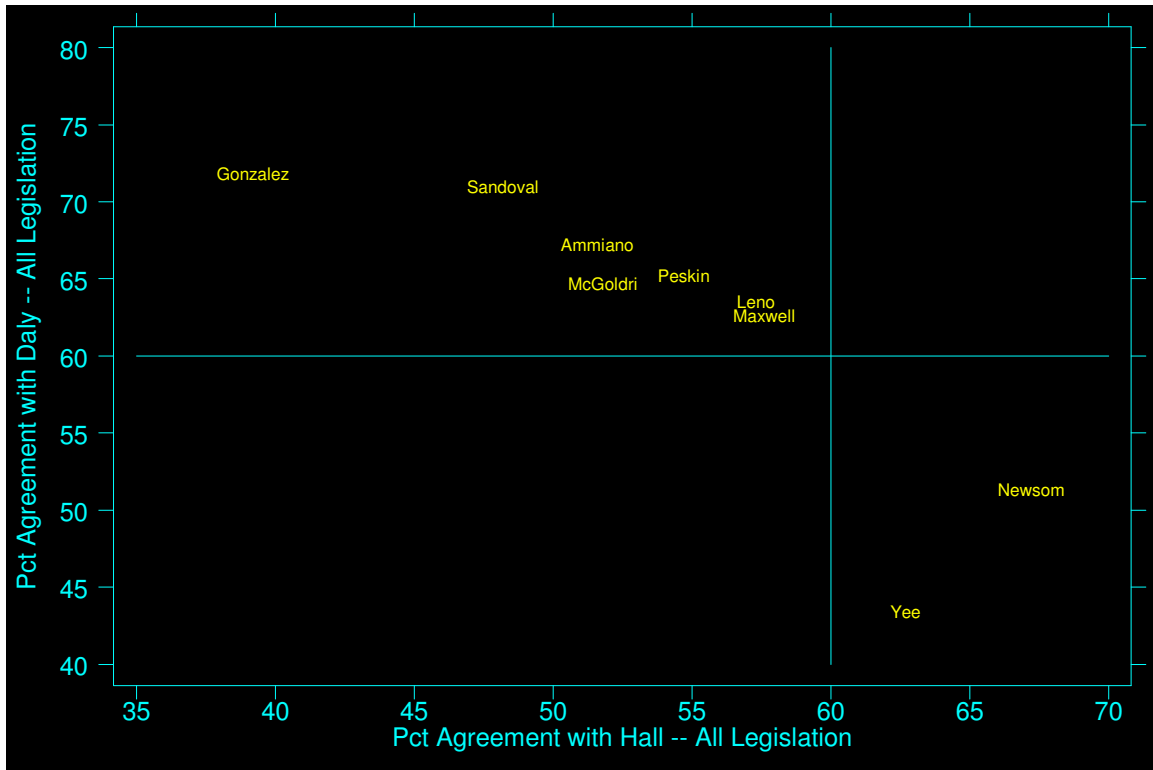


Figure 3A

Compared with Figure 3A, Figure 3B (GEHH legislation) shows a major convergence of Ammiano, McGoldrick, Peskin, Leno, Maxwell, Sandoval, and Gonzalez toward voting agreement with Daly on GEHH issues combined with much greater disagreement of these supervisors (viewed as a voting bloc) with Hall, Yee and Newsom on these kinds of issues. **Figure 3B thus provides the clearest visual evidence of a “progressive supermajority” voting bloc arrayed against a moderate-conservative minority voting bloc.** But it also shows (look at Figure 3A again) that such a voting bloc is confined mainly to GEHH-type issues, and it also reveals that Ammiano, Gonzalez and McGoldrick form a distinct voting bloc with Daly vis-à-vis Peskin, Leno, Maxwell and Sandoval within the progressive supermajority coalition.

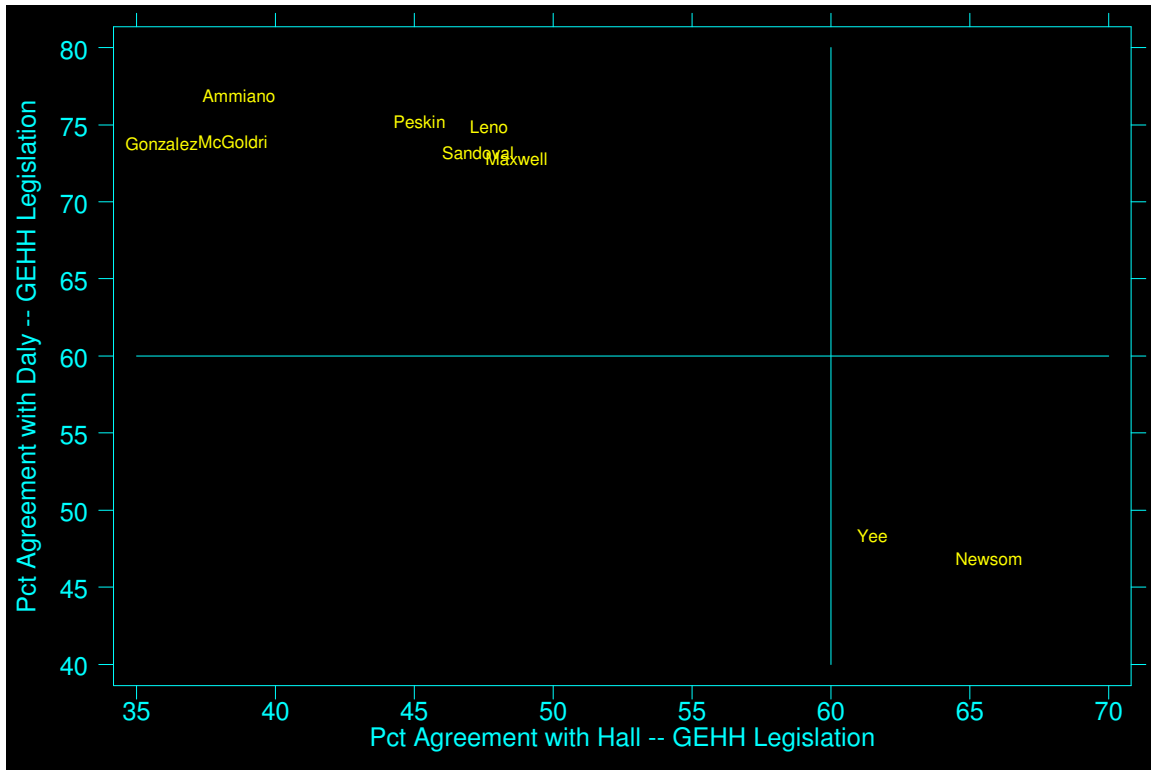


Figure 3B

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS:

Based on an analysis of all non-unanimous full board votes taken during the period January 1, 2001 through October 3, 2002, we can tentatively conclude that:

- (1) Even on non-unanimous full board votes taken during this period, there was typically more agreement than disagreement among supervisors in voting on legislation. The average percent voting agreement ranged from 52.7% to 74.4% on all legislation, and from 46.5% to 76.9% on GEHH-type legislation. See Table 1.
- (2) Supervisors who represent more extremely conservative or extremely progressive districts tend to have lower average voting agreement scores, while those who represent more ideologically moderate districts tend to have the highest average voting agreement scores – with Sup. Ammiano being the exception, possibly for the reasons given. See Figure 1.
- (3) Relatively few “pure” splits between a hypothesized progressive supermajority (Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin, and Sandoval) vs a moderate-conservative minority (Hall, Newsom, and Yee) were observed in non-

unanimous full board voting on all legislation (7.1%) or even on GEHH legislation (13.2%).

(4) Graphical analysis reveals a more loosely defined progressive supermajority voting against a more loosely defined moderate-conservative minority in full board voting, but only on GEHH-type legislation and also with a noticeable split between more progressive (Ammiano, Gonzalez, McGoldrick, and Daly) and less progressive (Peskin, Leno, Sandoval, and Maxwell) voting blocs within the progressive supermajority. See, especially, Figure 3B.

APPENDIX:

BREAKDOWN OF INDIVIDUAL SUPERVISORS' PERCENT AGREEMENT WITH EACH OF THE 10 OTHER SUPERVISORS IN VOTING ON ALL LEGISLATION AND GEHH LEGISLATION, JAN 1, 2001 – OCT 3, 2002.

(To illustrate how to read these tables, the table for Ammiano below shows that he voted the same way as Daly 66.8% of the time on ALL non-unanimous full board votes during this period, the same way as Daly 76.5% of the time on GEHH votes, and so on.)

AMMIANO

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	--	--
Daly	66.8	76.5
Gonzalez	65.8	74.5
Hall	51.6	38.7
Leno	85.3	88.2
Maxwell	86.3	88.2
McGoldrick	89.4	91.1
Newsom	69.2	59.4
Peskin	86.1	89.7
Sandoval	76.8	81.0
Yee	57.4	53.4

DALY

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	66.8	76.5
Daly	--	--
Gonzalez	71.4	73.4
Hall	36.8	35.3
Leno	63.1	74.5
Maxwell	62.2	72.4
McGoldrick	64.3	73.5
Newsom	50.9	46.4
Peskin	64.8	74.8
Sandoval	70.6	72.8
Yee	43.0	47.9

GONZALEZ

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	65.8	74.5
Daly	71.4	73.4
Gonzalez	--	--
Hall	39.2	35.9
Leno	64.7	75.8
Maxwell	62.4	72.4
McGoldrick	63.2	74.0
Newsom	48.4	49.3
Peskin	65.2	77.4

Sandoval	67.8	74.0
Yee	40.7	45.2

HALL

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	51.6	38.7
Daly	36.8	35.3
Gonzalez	39.2	35.9
Hall	--	--
Leno	57.3	47.7
Maxwell	57.6	48.7
McGoldrick	51.8	38.5
Newsom	67.2	65.7
Peskin	54.7	45.2
Sandoval	48.2	47.3
Yee	62.7	61.5

LENO

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	85.3	88.2
Daly	63.1	74.5
Gonzalez	64.7	75.8
Hall	57.3	47.7
Leno	--	--
Maxwell	89.7	92.7

McGoldrick	86.4	88.3
Newsom	77.0	67.4
Peskin	87.4	92.2
Sandoval	73.4	81.5
Yee	59.6	61.0

MAXWELL

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	86.3	88.2
Daly	62.2	72.4
Gonzalez	62.4	72.4
Hall	57.6	48.7
Leno	89.7	92.7
Maxwell	--	--
McGoldrick	87.9	90.3
Newsom	74.6	69.3
Peskin	83.6	90.9
Sandoval	74.4	83.3
Yee	61.8	58.6

McGOLDRICK

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	89.4	91.1
Daly	64.3	73.5
Gonzalez	63.2	74.0

Hall	51.8	38.5
Leno	86.4	88.3
Maxwell	87.9	90.3
McGoldrick	--	--
Newsom	71.5	60.8
Peskin	84.2	87.8
Sandoval	75.7	81.3
Yee	58.3	54.7

NEWSOM

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	69.2	59.4
Daly	50.9	46.4
Gonzalez	48.4	49.3
Hall	67.2	65.7
Leno	77.0	67.4
Maxwell	74.6	69.3
McGoldrick	71.5	60.8
Newsom	--	--
Peskin	71.6	64.0
Sandoval	65.2	60.3
Yee	67.7	73.0

PESKIN

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	86.1	89.7
Daly	64.8	74.8
Gonzalez	65.2	77.4
Hall	54.7	45.2
Leno	87.4	92.2
Maxwell	83.6	90.9
McGoldrick	84.2	87.8
Newsom	71.6	64.0
Peskin	--	--
Sandoval	74.1	83.8
Yee	55.6	56.1

SANDOVAL

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	76.8	81.0
Daly	70.6	72.8
Gonzalez	67.8	74.0
Hall	48.2	47.3
Leno	73.4	81.5
Maxwell	74.4	83.3
McGoldrick	75.7	81.3
Newsom	65.2	60.3
Peskin	74.1	83.8

Sandoval	--	--
Yee	54.3	55.0

YEE

Name	ALL	GEHH
Ammiano	57.4	53.4
Daly	43.0	47.9
Gonzalez	40.7	45.2
Hall	62.7	61.5
Leno	59.6	61.0
Maxwell	61.8	58.6
McGoldrick	58.3	54.7
Newsom	67.7	73.0
Peskin	55.6	56.1
Sandoval	54.3	55.0
Yee	--	--