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POLITICS

Computer Elected Governor of California Corpus Legis trounces human opponents in state election

By MICHAEL GENESERETH Oct. 25, 2024

California today became the first state in the Union to elect a computer as governor. The independent candidate, **Corpus Legis**, handily defeated its human opponents in a special election following the retirement of former governor **Jerry (Moonbeam) Brown**.

The election was seen by some as a referendum on Brown. Many voters had criticized Brown for his ill-considered promotion of pet projects of dubious merit, such as High Speed Rail. Others were disturbed by his tendency to ignore laws he did not like, an increasingly common trend in Californian politics.

Exit polls suggest that Legis voters were swayed by the comparative potential for rationality and fairness offered by machines. For some, there was a strong belief in the need for a new approach to governance in a nation divided by the pettiness and partisan bickering of human politicians. Also, as one voter pointed out, the new governor, being a machine, will be able to work for the state 24/7.

Legis comes to the office with significant bona fides. It was the first chairman of the computer science department at Stanford. It was the first machine to sit on the Palo Alto City Council, before becoming the city's first electronic mayor. And it was the first machine to pass the state bar exam.

That said, the road to the governor's mansion was not an easy one. Legis, a rule-based system, first had to survive a brutal primary election in which it was pitted against another computer candidate **Alpha (Google) Watson**, a machine learning system. Early in the season, Watson enjoyed a comfortable lead in the polls based on its many scientific and commercial successes and its flashy marketing. During the election, Watson pummeled Legis with numerous hypotheses derived from its analysis of big data.

However, the tide turned against Watson when it could not explain its positions beyond citing statistics about how things had been done in the past. It stumbled further when, due to an absence of relevant data, it was unable to say how it would implement a new law. Finally, it lost credibility

when, on the basis of its statistical analysis, it theorized that Legis was actually Antonin Scalia, ignoring the fact that Scalia had died several years before. Evidently, Watson was unaware that Scalia's death invalidated its theory, most likely due to its lack of common sense.

The results of the election are not without controversy. Multiple court challenges have already been filed by citizens alarmed at the prospects of an AI governor. **Steven Hawking** suggests that it is another example of AI beginning to dominate the world. **Bill Gates** argues that, since the system was developed on an Apple Computer, it is just a toy. At the same time, various luminaries have expressed their support. The **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences** lauds the election as an example of increasing diversity. And, in an unexpected turn of events, **Elon Musk** says it is a welcome turn of events, suggesting that we need to be a "multi-technology species" to deal with the possibility of biological extinction.

Corpus Legis will be sworn in next month. Provided that the election survives the court challenges. And provided that the government can figure out to how to swear in a machine.