Brown puts deep imprint on California judiciary

By Howard Mintz, San Jose Mercury News

As he prepares to fill a surprise opening on the California Supreme Court, Gov. Jerry Brown's track record of appointing judges strongly points toward a consistent theme – scouring the legal ranks for candidates with some intellectual firepower who might add diversity to the nation's largest judiciary.

Justice Joyce Kennard's unexpected announcement this month that she will retire in April has given Brown a chance to name his second Supreme Court justice in his latest go-round as governor, a clear opportunity to heavily influence a court that has tilted conservative since he left office in 1983.

A review of Brown's 164 judicial appointments since 2011 paints a portrait of a Democratic governor trying to break new ground on the bench without taking the risks he took back in his first tenure, notably his ill-fated appointment of former Chief Justice Rose Bird, ousted by voters in 1986.

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