

Techies Buck the Establishment on Schools

*Silicon Valley — thought to be a Clinton-Gore Bastion —
Breaks Ranks on Critical Education Issues*

T I M W . F E R G U S O N

VARIED ELEMENTS of the press caught on to recent outbreaks of anti-establishment thinking about schools in Silicon Valley, but California scribes have been slow to put the activity into a larger and more intriguing political context. To wit, this supposed bastion of support for Democrats of the Clinton-Gore stripe is decidedly antagonistic to the party line on this Issue One, a line that comes straight out of the National Education Association's headquarters. Maybe, just maybe, this is a wedge for separating AlGore from a precious funding base.

First out of the box, recall, was software guy Ron Unz with his bilingual Proposition. He was acting solo, but the techies surely gave no aid and comfort to the "227" opposition. Then the Technology Network, a consortium of largely apolitical executives, got behind an initiative drive to lift the cap on charter schools, which the NEA affiliate had kept on. The Legislature backed down in the face of such a ballot measure. Not everything the Network favors is anathema to the unions (it wants to lower the two-thirds threshold for approving local school bonds, for example) and its leader, Reed Hastings, is open to deals with the entrenched interests. But within the group are individuals like Floyd Kvamme of the Kleiner Perkins venture-capital firm, who are fiery champions of choice and competition in schools.

Not to be outdone in that cause is Tim Draper, another venture capitalist (based in Redwood City) who is funding a "cyberinitiative" to draw up and then qualify a March 2000 "choice" ballot measure, improving on the Proposition 174 attempt a few years back. Draper's prob-

Tim W. Ferguson is California Political Review's press critic.

ably naive and a little full of himself, but his commitment appears real and his on-line solicitation is a novelty with a populist flavor. At the very least he will preoccupy the teacher unions.

Additionally, California saw the political awakening of a new David Packard — the magnate's son, David W., who coughed up \$500,000 for the ill-fated Gloria Tuchman campaign and made no bones about his distaste for incumbent superintendent Delaine Eastin. Previously, Packard had confined himself to volunteer work to improve reading programs.

Put all of these omens together and you have a major story possibly in the making. Newspaper readers might look forward to the parts becoming the whole in 1999.



Gray Davis, facing a tight budget, talks up the idea of inexpensive fixes for the public schools, such as higher standards and more testing. You might think this is apple pie stuff, but take a look at what happened when Lisa Keegan, Arizona's superintendent of schools, tried to enforce a test-passing requirement for high school graduation. According to a front-page item in the *Scottsdale Tribune*, Keegan was accosted at a meeting by loudmouth parents who objected to having their kids be required to clear such a hurdle. "Not everyone is going to be an engineer!" one shouted. Gray might think he has just the CTA to mollify. But Mom and Dad (if there is one) are

other big parts of California's (and the nation's) learning problem, and they are just as much in denial.

The endorsement of Proposition 1A by the California Taxpayers Association permitted the *Los Angeles Times* to describe the \$9.2 billion school-bond tax measure on Page One as being backed by "taxpayer groups." Outside of Tom McClintock and — give him credit — Curt Pringle, true taxpayer voices were few and far between on that lollapalooza. On the subject of "rebuilding schools," how about an accounting of how many California public high schools have swimming pools (it would take some, er, digging — no one seems to tabulate this) vs. how many in other states that spend less and get higher test scores? The guess here is that no one treads water like California.

You probably saw those feminist-realist ads reading "Women Count" and urging the girls to turn out. One hopes the newspapers didn't print them free as a "public service." The *San Francisco Examiner* called the sponsoring group nonpartisan, but noted that Esprit Corp.'s Susie Tompkins Buell, who "spearheaded" the effort, was one of the top 10 California donors to the Democrat Party in 1996. The GOP's Mike Madrid said it was just a push to get Barbara Boxer re-elected. Worked pretty well.

The GOP's Madrid made the curious point to the *LA Times*'s George Skelton that Latinos are turned off because the party isn't strong enough for gun controls. He should have been asked for some poll data on that. But Skelton was busy lecturing Republicans for being "toadies for the gun lobby" in the course of a column contending the election showed the "GOP Needs Some

New [ethnic] Republicans." Fact is, a lot of candidates would like to avoid gun issues but the NRA types just can't let well enough alone, helping Democrats raise the issue in contested races.

The *Examiner*'s Erin McCormick analyzed how term limits has prompted the interest-group PACs to pump funds into non-incumbents, often from their own affinity groups: dentists backing a dentist, for example. The usual suspects — Common Cause and Sherry Bebitch Jeffe — offered as how this amounted to buying seats, as opposed (the article suggested) to the good old days when

lobbyists merely courted a seasoned legislator out of hopes he "would understand and give some credence to their point of view." Pity the poor careerist who now not only has to move along after a few terms, but has to share the Third House's money with rookies! The funding trend would appear just to bring constituency politics out in the open, and as Kim Alexander of the California Voter Foundation pointed out, the public is capable of sniffing out something as obvious as that.

The *Orange County Register*, meanwhile, surveyed the makeup of the new Legislature and found that term limits had broadened representation in most respects. However, the Assembly elected in 1998 has fewer blacks, is older, and is fuller of local-government types than the one chosen in 1990.

The *LA Times* noted on the front page that the Central Valley continues to lag the rest of the state's recovery, with double-digit unemployment in several counties. The paper did *not* go on to editorialize that this ought to caution emboldened Capitol liberals who think they can get away with strict wage and workplace regulations statewide. Maybe they can do so along the coast without damaging the economy much, but in the Valley, which



WOMEN COUNT
Vote Tuesday, November 3rd

competes with low-cost regions of the United States, such policies promise more misery ahead.



One of UC Irvine's early Democrat gifts to Orange County, management professor Judy Rosener, had these kind words for the state's pusillanimous corporate lobbies in the *Los Angeles Business Journal*: "...the line between pro-business Republicans and pro-government Democrats is blurring This year, the California Manufacturers Association hosted high-priced political fund raisers honoring Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa and Senate President pro-Tempore John Burton, liberal Democrats who in decades past would never have been recipients of business largess [of course, the money goes straight to electing other Dems who keep them in power]. In a number of state legislative races, the California Chamber of Commerce was less than enthusiastic in its support of Republican candidates who ran against pro-business [as opposed to pro-market] Democrats in safe districts. This made Republican business people fume."



Matthew Shepard's savage slaying in Wyoming was widely linked to conservative opponents of gay rights and homosexual activity, with San Francisco media taking the lead. Elaine Herscher's *Chronicle* "news analysis" lead said the killing came "at a time of growing rhetoric and violence against gays." Among the statistics cited to back that up was a "study released earlier this year by the University of Washington [in which] one in 10 community college students admitted to committing a hate crime against gays." How about defining the term, for starters?



There was little press (except for a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed) about homosexual pressure groups trying and nearly succeeding in depriving the Claremont Institute of hotel meeting space in Los Angeles for a conference to challenge the idea of a "gay gene and related political matters." The Beverly Hilton cancelled the reserved space

and the pinkshirts then allegedly tried to disrupt the proceedings when they were moved to the Biltmore.



The *WSJ/California* section continues dutifully to report on bureaucratic power plays the press usually ignores as too "inside." As part of the takeover of Pacific Bell by what used to be Southwest Bell, the Public Utilities Commission forced a \$50 million handover to groups that ostensibly aim to see that phone tones reach everybody in the state. The Universal Service Alliance argues that digital-data connection is "the civil-rights issue of the 21st Century." The money pot will be administered by the Community Technology Foundation of California, chaired by ex-Assemblywoman Gwen Moore, who also runs African Americans for Telecommunications Equity. The first batch of grants, up to \$15,000, will go to form focus groups to determine needs. The *Journal* skipped the translation, but you can read between the lines: this is a gravy train for the advocacy sector.



Kudos to Dan Walters for a *Sacramento Bee* column on the abuse of redevelopment law to have taxpayers subsidize mall upgradings such as the one in oh-so-conservative Mission Viejo. Policy wonks understand how this 30-year-old legislation is chronically misused, but there is only a ragtag constituency of property owners around the state disposed to fight it. Meanwhile, most Californians blithely patronize the stores — Nordstrom particularly — that tap into the corporate welfare.



"Willie Brown Shows How Not to Run a City" is the title of a dissection of the press-pampered mayor by the *City Journal* (Autumn 1998). Co-author is Matt Robinson, among a coterie of conservatives or libertarians employed by *Investor's Business Daily*. The quarterly focuses, as its name suggests, on urban issues, and is published by the Manhattan Institute. That "think tank" has managed to get traction in policymaking in its very liberal hometown, something its California counterparts haven't.

CPR

WASHINGTON LETTER

by Leon E. McKinney

California Congressional Delegation Report

Cox Says Panel Found 'Harm' to U.S. National Security

Two U.S. satellite companies with close ties to the president and the Democratic National Committee accused of giving information that helped improve Chinese ICBMs.

Yet another bombshell burst on **Bill Clinton** at a December 30 **Washington D.C.** news conference when **California** Representative **Chris Cox** (R-Newport Beach) said two U.S. satellite companies with close ties to the president and the **Democratic National Committee** (DNC) had engaged in activities that Cox said harmed American national security.

This latest Clinton scandal began to explode last June with the disclosure of a **Justice Department** investigation into whether the satellite companies, **Hughes Electronics** and **Loral Space & Communications**, violated export-control laws in dealings with **communist China**. The charges arose from reports the companies prepared to help China's dictators learn why two of their launch vehicles failed: the first report, prepared by Hughes Electronics, analyzed a 1995 crash that destroyed an **Apstar 2** satellite carried atop a Chinese **Long March 2E** launch vehicle; the second report, from Loral, analyzed a 1996 crash of a Chinese **Long March 3B** rocket at the **Xichang Satellite Launch Center** in China.

Hughes and Loral were accused of giving information to the Chinese that helped them improve the reliability of their ICBMs. The Clinton connection was that Hughes and Loral were (and still are) among the largest corporate contributors to the 1992 and 1996 **Clinton-Gore campaigns** and the DNC. Loral Chairman **Bernard Schwartz**' personal contributions of more than \$1 million during the 1996 election cycle made him the Democrats' biggest individual donor. At the same time, Clinton was changing long-standing export-control policies to the benefit of Loral. The **House of Representatives** formed a select panel, headed up by Representative Cox, to look into things.

At his December 30 news conference, Cox announced that the panel had concluded its investigation. Cox said the panel had held 22 investigative hearings, took more than 200 hours of testimony from more than 75 witnesses, conducted more than 700 hours of interviews and depositions from more than 150 people, and issued 21 subpoenas.

The panel's 700-page, five-volume report is classified, and few details have leaked out. The panel's five Republicans and four Democrats unanimously approved the report, and made 38 recommendations to tighten controls over exports to China, to be presented to **Congress** and the **White House**. A declassified version could be available within weeks.

But Cox made sure we wouldn't have to wait until then for the most important finding when he said

California Political Review Contributing Editor Leon E. McKinney is an engineering consultant in St. Louis, Missouri.