

# More moderate than thee

*Editorialists urge 'moderation'; special interests await pay-offs; liberals yank left; and conservatives wait to pounce — Gray Davis should deliver us an interesting several years.*

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

CALIFORNIA'S FREE-SPIRITED capitol press corps has reached another near-unanimous verdict, that Gray Davis is one moderate fellow. The *Los Angeles Times* editorialized that he'd better be, lest those Demo partisans who now rule the Legislature (most of them from the LA area endorsed by the yin-yang *Times*) go on a spending spree. Journalistic den mother Sherry Bebitch Jeffe assured us on the paper's op-ed pages that the Dems are too politically smart to "throw themselves off the deep end." Besides, as the *San Francisco Examiner* and others complained, "Davis will be hamstrung" by the 25 percent reduction in the vehicle tax that Pete Wilson (really, Tom McClintock) got enacted — "a tax cut that will cost the state \$1 billion this year." More, if we're lucky!

So is the guv as Gray as they say? Well, with every scribe but Dan Walters giving him a honeymoon, he was whatever you wanted him to be. He let a reformed murderer fry in the Big House, so we can erase those Dan Lungren ads about Rose Bird from our minds. He did a dance of wills with the teacher union on accountability. Same with the state employees clamoring for a big raise. So there were early reasons to hold right-wing fire.

Of course, he does have interest groups to attend to. The *LA Times* noted that Democrats were 16 years behind in their judicial appointments. (Davis won't name "ideological crusaders," an adviser said.) Latinas in the Legislature want more public spending on their sisters' health care. And the gays want same-sex benefits and marriage rites. Illegal immigrants will get the prenatal care that the nasty Wilson took away. Welfare recipients got a small "raise." Organized labor will turn back the clock on mandatory overtime pay. The trial lawyers want freedom from caps on damage awards. The public-works lobby demands \$16 billion in transit bonds. The enviros got their favorite, Mary Nichols, in as Resources secretary, and Jose Medina, a San Francisco supervisor

with no background in transportation, was named to head Caltrans as a favor to Willie Brown. (Credit Scott Winokur of the hometown *Examiner* with a nice column explaining the machinations of that deal.)

The savvy left, which knows the real score, is going to try to force Davis into something meaningful: attacking Proposition 13 for a honey pot of revenue. The *LA Weekly's* Harold Meyerson was quick off the ball on that one. It's going to be an interesting several years. The press room may have trouble keeping its story straight.

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On the silly side of the Mall, there's a horse race for vacuous self promotion between reigning champion Kathleen Connell, the re-elected state controller, and Phil Angelides, the new treasurer. Angelides-elect wasted no time in burning reporters' fax machines with a self-important pronouncement on his 19-person "transition team"; an advisory of the swearing in of "the first Sacramento native elected to statewide office since Hiram Johnson"; a letter to Gray Davis advising him on how to revise the state budget, and a scroll of "second phase" appointees of such merit that they included, as the new executive director of the School Finance Authority, the Southern California head of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. (She's obviously qualified to solve the classroom crowding problem.) This tinhorn pain in the tush may soon wear out his welcome even among his fellow earnest liberals in the media.

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Los Angeles experienced a serious dust storm for several weeks as publications local and national called into question the work of Marxist pseudo-historian Mike Davis. He's been the toast of the literary establishment for his books *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear*, which paint LA not as a bustling center of multi-ethnic entrepreneurship but as a cauldron of racial and class warfare and a particularly egregious rapist of

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Mother Nature. Seems the twin best sellers contain many falsehoods, minor and otherwise. When a couple of contrarian free weeklies in town picked up on the work of a gadfly who found Davis's factoids and footnotes wanting, this provided kindling for a real intellectual firestorm in LaLa Land. Some of the outsider stuff was unsparing (London's *Economist*: "City of frauds.") The *LA Times*, whose left-leaning social-studies staff had provided a platform for Davis' dystopian vision over the years, was forced into addressing the controversy with a news feature that was a classic for backing into a story (beginning with a picture of Davis bemused by a swirling controversy that readers dependent on the *Times* wouldn't even know existed). The paper followed this with regular columnist Robert "Green Jeans" Jones decrying the "truth squad" presuming to police Mike Davis. All good fun!

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The political press hadn't paid GOP Congressman Jim Rogan enough attention until he became an impeachment "manager." Now, look out. His electoral death warrant in the marginal Glendale district north of downtown LA has been signed, sealed, and delivered. The aforementioned Meyerson of the *LA Weekly* told his troops that ex-judge Rogan had deceptively positioned himself as a thoughtful pragmatist but in fact had been a Pat Nolan clone all along. Albert Hunt of the *Wall Street Journal*, who's usually willing to cut his good sources of whatever persuasion some slack, was still labeling him "sensibly moderate conservative" and one of the few Clinton prosecutors not due for a dunce cap. But he, too saw trouble in Rogan's future.

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In case you were wondering where *Sacramento Bee* pundit John Jacobs stood on the political divide in Washington (you were wondering, weren't you?), take this concluding paragraph of his observations on the State of the Union speech and the GOP response: "One was the party of optimism and the future; the other, the party of revenge and limitation. No wonder Clinton's poll ratings are so high. This isn't rocket science." And thank goodness for that.

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You can go either way on George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism," but it was no favor to have Robert Scheer rising to his defense in Column Left of the *LA Times* op-ed. Troglodytes like Dan Quayle were picking on Bush Junior, and that was too much for battling Bob. Not a kiss of death, perhaps, and maybe Scheer's talk-radio buddy Arianna Huffington — the compassion queen — is working her notorious wiles on him, but with friends like these, Bush is going to have a lot of party activists to assuage.

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The *Orange County Register's* news department continued its efforts to enlighten benighted inhabitants of the curious kingdom. It dispatched a swat team of reporters to sing the praises of a new federal "empowerment zone" (read: eligible for special subsidies) in Santa Ana ("City awaits promise") arranged by Demo sweetheart Loretta Sanchez. It promoted the "campus cool" of low-rise office parks (which compete with unsightly towers but have the unfortunate effect — unmentioned by the *Reg* — of contributing to the hated suburban sprawl). And its periodic Sunday sob story on p. 1 focused on a family struggling to get by on the high cost of housing behind the Orange Curtain — a family with, it appeared, at least five young children. Like every story of this familiar type, it not once raised the question of why this struggling household continues to add to its numbers. How callous a consideration — just the kind of thing they'd say in Orange County!

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The *American Journalism Review* devoted an astounding 18 pages to dissecting the pitched battle between two newspapers rarely read east of the Sierras: the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Only hard core readers will make it to the end, so let this column save you the No-Doz: the winner is ... yet to be revealed! One element that apparently figures not at all is the political tone of the publications. This is curious when you look at what distinguishes media products elsewhere. But then, a region that worships capital gains and Barbara Boxer at the same time is obviously inattentive to ideology.

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Let's not forget the bouquets. The *LA Times's* ongoing school-reform series reported that the federal Title I program for impoverished children has benefitted, most of all, the 50,000 "parents or activists from surrounding neighborhoods" who've been hired to be what are charitably called classroom aides. The kids themselves seem to get little out of it. The *Wall Street Journal's* op-ed page published a Brookings Institution fellow's finding that the federal payroll represents only a fourth of the true employment that Washington requires. The rest are positions created by federal contracts, state and local workers carrying out federal mandates, and employees of the government's grant recipients. And finally, praise again is due the *New Times Los Angeles* weekly, for a cover story on the state's MTBE "clean gasoline" fiasco that has polluted the water basins of much of California. Now a push is under way nationally for mandates on the oil industry to do a wider round of cleansing. See how often the enthusiastic environmental writers make reference to what happened with MTBE.

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# WASHINGTON LETTER

by Leon E. McKinney

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California Congressional Delegation Report

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## Cox urges curbs on Clinton deals with China

White House vows bitter fight to protect presidential practice of allowing militarily useful technology transfers that benefit key Democrat donors.

Last issue, we reviewed the December 30 release by Rep **Chris Cox** (R-Newport Beach) of the classified report by a Cox-headed select House panel investigating another example of the **Clinton administration's** playing footsie with the law. Cox told a press conference that two U.S. satellite companies with close ties to the president and the **Democratic National Committee** (DNC) — **Hughes Electronics** and **Loral Space & Communications** — had engaged in activities that damaged U.S. national security. Specifically, Hughes and Loral apparently provided technology that helped improve **Communist China's** ballistic missiles to such a degree that China's missiles can now reach **Chicago**.

Loral chairman **Bernard Schwartz'** personal contributions of more than \$1 million during the 1996 election cycle made him the Democrats' biggest individual donor; during that same period Clinton changed long-standing export-control policies designed to safeguard U.S. military technology, to the benefit of Loral.

The Cox panel's 700-page, five-volume classified report — unanimously approved by the panel's five Republicans and four Democrats — made 38 recommendations to tighten controls over exports to China. Now the Clinton Empire has struck back, sending its response to congressional leaders on February 2. The 32-page document promised a bitter fight on the Cox panel's most important proposals. One of those proposals would have U.S. officials demand no-prior notice, on-site inspections of Chinese facilities that import high-speed computers from the **United States**; should the Chinese refuse, then the allowable performance levels of computers sent to China would be reduced.

This proposal was prompted by repeated Chinese violations of terms and conditions of export licenses. One particularly shady stunt by the Chinese stood out. **McDonnell Douglas**, as part of its joint effort with **China Aerospace** (owned by the Chinese government) to produce commercial airliners, had exported high-speed computers and computer-controlled machine tooling to China. Despite the export license granted by the U.S. **State** and **Defense Departments** requiring that the equipment remain at a specific commercial aircraft manufacturing facility, China secretly transferred the equipment to a nearby military aircraft manufacturing facility sometime during 1994.

Clinton is most upset by Cox's proposal to make it easier for agencies opposing high-tech exports deals on national security grounds — *i.e.*, the State or Defense Departments — to stop them. Currently, if State or Defense oppose an export, they have to take their concerns up through the government's ranks and ultimately to Clinton to obtain a delay. No prizes for guessing that Clinton has routinely issued waiv-

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