

# A Party with the Courage of No Convictions?

Where the New  
Post-Special  
Schwarzenegger  
would take the  
GOP ... and the  
course the Party  
ought to chart.

by John Kurzweil

If a Tory does not believe that private property is one of the main bulwarks of individual freedom, then he had better become a socialist and have done with it. Indeed one of the reasons for our electoral failure is that people believe too many Conservatives have become socialists already. Britain's progress towards socialism has been an alternation of two steps forward with half a step back.

If every Labour Government is prepared to reverse every Tory measure, while Conservative Governments accept nearly all socialist measures as being "the will of the people," the end result is only too plain. And why should anyone support a party that seems to have the courage of no convictions?"

— Margaret Thatcher, "My Kind of Tory Party,"  
*Daily Telegraph*, January 30, 1975

MRS. THATCHER wrote these lines at the end of a 12-month period during which her Party suffered two devastating losses in national elections. A few days after her article appeared, she was elected Conservative Party leader. Four years later she became British Prime Minister, matching the Reagan Revolution with one of her own across the Atlantic.

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One year after Mrs. Thatcher wrote her *Daily Telegraph* article, Republican Gerald Ford lost the presidency to Jimmy Carter. Looking back (in a 1992 article), William E. Brock, who served as Republican National Committee Chairman from 1977 until 1981, recalled the condition of his Party following that defeat, making a point notably reminiscent of Mrs. Thatcher's: "Republicans in 1976 ... found themselves stung by defeat and *largely bereft of those tools essential to any successful party, a strong grounding in principles and ideas, and a broad and diverse base of support.*" (*emphasis added*)

Brock went on to re-build the national GOP (with a mighty assist from Ronald Reagan, Jack Kemp, and many others) into what even liberal Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan had to admit a mere few years later had become "the Party of ideas" — not to mention the Party that controlled the White House, setting the nation's political direction, for the next 12 years. (Brock wrote in 1992 because his Party had just lost another presidential election — to Bill Clinton — following another loss of direction, as Brock saw it, under President George H. W. Bush.)

Here in California, it is time to state Thatch-

er's and Brock's essential truths again in the wake of last year's Special Election fiasco and, perhaps even more so, following Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2006 State of the State speech calling for massive borrowing, praising steeply spiraling education spending, and, of all things (from a one-time disciple of Nobel economist and *Free to Choose* author Milton Friedman) a *minimum wage hike!* — “so,” as the governor put it, “those who often work the hardest and earn the least ... [will] benefit from California's growth” — a justification, Mr. Friedman would gladly explain, that turns reality on its head: wage controls hurt, first and foremost, precisely “those who often work the hardest and earn the least” by throwing them *out* of work, depriving them of a chance to learn to be more productive workers capable of commanding a “living wage,” and forcing them to pay higher prices for everyday goods and services.\*

IT IS TIME to re-state Thatcher's and Brock's essential truths because, when reverses like those suffered by Britain's Tories in 1974 and American Republicans in 1976 are suffered by the California GOP, the default reaction has come to be: our principles are no good, they don't “resonate” with voters, we must find out what people want to hear and parrot it back to them while nominating candidates on the principle that the more muddled their convictions the better; that our ideal candidate is someone rich, popular, and politically slippery enough to seem to be all things to all people. Of course, part of this reaction comes from the RINO species of Republicans who, as Mrs. Thatcher said, have become socialists already and who jump at any chance to urge their Party to follow the left-wing path they themselves

chose long ago, but I am not concerned with these folks here. I wish them well, although I confess a preference that they would oppose the GOP's defining convictions from the more natural position of registered Democrat.

I *am* writing to the vast majority of Republicans who genuinely believe their Party's principles are not only the best but the only prescription for a good and prosperous life for ordinary Californians, but who doubt their Party can “win” running on its own true positions — as if the defeats suffered by Dan Lungren, Bill Simon, and George W. Bush (in California), along with Arnold Schwarzenegger's Special Election blow-out, had all followed campaigns that were models not only of consistent adherence to principle but also of thorough, competent, expertly-executed electioneering; as if these defeats could therefore confidently be chalked up to a GOP message “too conservative” for “liberal” California. The truth about these campaigns is, first, that the principles were not always discernible — least of all in Lungren's case — and that, second, what particularly characterized them all, running like a bright, gleaming thread throughout, is an ad hoc, seat-of-the-pants, cook book (pick your cliché) approach. They showed little imagination, scant attention to the blocking and tackling basics of politics, and less a determination to win than to insure that the hired gun consultants pocketed princely fees for jobs superficially done. Most seem to have been conducted without so much as the rudimentary market research on *how* to convey our positions and showcase our candidates to their best advantage that any competently-run business would perform before launching an even moderately ambitious new project.

California Republicans have spent most of the past decade trying to bring about a revolutionary

\* Friedman, on the minimum wage, wrote: “The high rate of unemployment among teenagers, and especially black teenagers, is both a scandal and a serious source of social unrest. Yet it is largely a result of minimum wage laws. *We regard the minimum wage law as one of the most, if not the most, anti-black laws on the statute books.*” (*emphasis added*) Schwarzenegger himself, in a September 2003 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, wrote that “Mr. Davis says he wants jobs, but he has done everything possible to chase away job creators. Thanks to the economic policies of this administration, for the first time in California history, more native-born Americans are leaving this state than are moving here. No one would confuse the destructive economic policies of Gov. Davis and Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante with the pro-growth ideas of Milton Friedman or Adam Smith.” The last California governor to increase the state's controlled wage level was Gray Davis, in 2002.



reversal of direction in the political culture of one of the world's most powerful and influential political entities with less clear thinking, research, preparation, and attention to detail in execution — and, indeed, with little evidence even of realizing the magnitude of the job they have undertaken — than one typical small businessman would employ in opening a single hamburger stand. This Republican approach might somehow prove adequate if the opposition were similarly trifling, but not when the other side is willing and able to spend and to do whatever it takes to win, as California Democrats have repeatedly shown themselves to be.

**N**O DOUBT this judgment is overly harsh in many specific cases that could be aduced from the various campaigns I listed above, which employed the professional and volunteer services of many hard-working, dedicated, competent people. I respect these folks and their efforts without reservation. But the fact remains that the overall planning and execution of these GOP campaigns, perhaps most spectacularly of all in last year's Special Election, conformed to the pattern I have described. Let me offer two examples in evidence from the Special.

First: a luncheon I attended a few weeks after the November voting featured a Republican, California-based, veteran political strategist as speaker. He had had no official or consulting role in the governor's campaign, but described what had happened. Discussing Proposition 75 (Paycheck Protection), for instance, he mentioned research he'd done the last time Californians had voted on the issue (Proposition 226, in 1998) pointing out several enlightening discoveries he had made. First, he said, the opposition hit pay dirt with their argument that 75 was "unfair" and "unbalanced" because it applied only to unions and not to corporations that use shareholder funds to finance political efforts — a

charge that I confess struck me when I first heard it as a desperate reach, the cases being by no means comparable. In fact, however, it inflicted significant damage to 75 with many voters. Why?

His seven-year-old research, the speaker said, had shown that a lot of Californians — prominently including, I presume, the dreaded "swing" voters who make up their minds how they'll vote at the last minute, often based on the most superficial or irrelevant reasons — start off suspicious of "political reform" measures championed by one party and opposed by the other, no matter their non-partisan "good government"

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pretensions. In that context, he continued, they simply do not believe that Republicans really care about union members or their right to decide for themselves about the political uses of their pay (which deflates what had always seemed to me an effective descriptive: paycheck protection). Given this foundation, when they *then* hear that the idea is to target a Democrat funding source (unions) while leaving alone what these same swing voters quaintly believe is a Republican funding source (corporate America), they conclude it must be a GOP stealth attempt to rope unsuspecting voters into a sleazy partisan hit on the opposition, made worse by what seems to be a false appeal to simple fairness. They vote "no," even though they actually agree with the policy change the initiative would bring about.

Yes, it's perfectly awful reasoning, but you might as well curse the darkness. Anyway, what most struck me about the presentation at this luncheon was that an individual not even part of the campaign appeared clearly to know far more about what it would take to win or lose than did the high-paid experts the governor employed to

work for a year or more on the sole job of bringing home a victory. That seven-year-old research could so easily expose a critical failure to understand the “market” on this issue indicates an overall lack of seriousness about victory.

This conclusion is verified further, first, by the campaign’s blasé assumption that a year of ubiquitous Schwarzenegger-bashing could be undone with a few weeks, or even days, of furious campaigning by the governor at the end and, second, by Schwarzenegger operatives’ assurances to interested Republican leaders and activists during the final weeks before the vote that their “internal polling” showed several propositions winning, despite the near-universal finding of California’s *public* polls that all were in deep trouble, a conclusion vindicated by events (and repeating a public vs. “internal” polling story line featured in the Lungren campaign and, if memory serves, in the Bush and Simon efforts as well).

If further evidence is needed, I quote my colleague William E. Saracino from this magazine’s most recent issue (“Role Model,” *CPR*, Nov./Dec. 2005):

A high-level Team Schwarzenegger strategist recently allowed that the governor’s people, possibly to their surprise, discovered “about two months ago” that Proposition 73 — parental notification — “would drive [special election] turn-out our way.” Consequently, people and resources have the past several weeks been diverted to bolster what had been the neglected cause of Prop. 73’s passage. OK, except that most conservative activists had figured this out, and were talking about it widely, at least as early as late [2004]. Why did the cadre of top GOP campaign professionals take until late summer to get it? Part of the reason is that there remains among many of these professionals a still strong, though (one hopes) fading, anti-conservative grass roots animus left over from the Pete Wilson era. At best, they simply are not in the habit of taking rank and file Republican conservatives seriously and so tend not to think about how these people — their own Party’s base voters, for crying out loud — can help even in the most obvious circumstances.

The relevance is clear on this point of William Brock’s warning about parties that lack “a broad

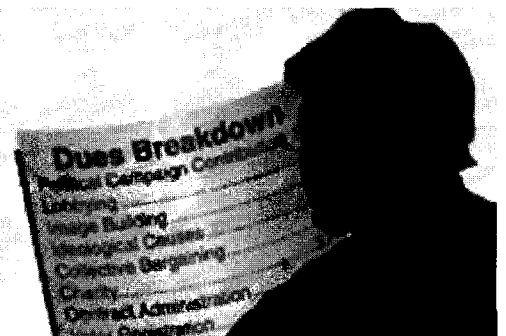
and diverse base of support.” If union member Democrats don’t let their many differences with social issue lefties (and other Donkey Party factions) blind them to the advantages of cooperative effort, perhaps “big tent” Republican moderates could learn to do the same.

**A**LL RIGHT, this is not time for intra-Party score settling. Actually, the last several years have seen a much-reduced amount of GOP infighting at the Party level over issues *and* a strong revival, particularly in county Parties, of “command focus,” to borrow Lee Atwater’s apt phrase, on nuts-and-bolts organizing, voter registration, fund raising, and GOTV. Those are the party structures’ jobs; Party members only play into their opponents’ hands when they allow issue disputes to distract from this crucial mission.

But outlining clear positions on issues — which, really, means spelling out an overall policy direction for the state — is exactly the mission of Republican candidates, campaigns, and issue organizations. *Their* sole purpose is, one, to win public support for the direction Republicans propose to lead California and then, two, to employ the power entrusted to the

Party’s candidates by the voters actually to *move* the state in that direction as expeditiously as possible. You can’t do that by adopting either a muddled message, no message at all, or, despite presenting a clear *rhetorical* message, in fact meandering all over the issue spectrum in the policies you embrace in office — as the governor has commenced doing.

The GOP renaissance Bill Brock described began by acknowledging this order of priority: laying out and pursuing a clear policy direction comes first, and all the specific message formulation and delivery, all the organizational work, and all the picking of candidates must serve that





primary goal. A party "that seems to have the courage of no convictions" obviously can't lead anyone anywhere. Indeed, it soon becomes embroiled in absurd soul searching about its own reason for being: Is it merely to win offices, no matter what our office holders do with them? A yes answer to that question leads into the trackless desert of finding "a message that resonates with voters." It issues in preposterous calls for minimum wage hikes to pla-



Cruz Bustamante

cate the very unions sworn to block every policy initiative supported by the Republican rank and file. It hoodwinks Party leaders into stiff-arming the voters who rely upon the GOP to save them from a rapacious, self-destructive state government establishment.

It invites and, in the case of the California GOP, has brought on an absurd domination over most political activity by a consultant culture that exists not nearly as much to win elections or influence state policy as to maintain (at princely pay levels) a cadre of campaign "experts." A weak attachment to governing principles encourages a species of bureaucratic mentality among political professionals. Why work hard to serve a vague, shifting notion of where the state should go? Why put in the long hours fighting an entrenched power structure when an alternative structure has not been defined, much less shown to be better? Why not just go through the motions? Why not just collect the handsome paychecks or consulting fees and enjoy the perks and comforts of office and leave the heavy lifting to those who remember what the lifting is all about? Taken all together, failure of principle is a formula for Party irrelevancy and, if indulged long enough, demise.

FOR A Party caught in such a downward spiral, the only solution is to recall and reaffirm the principles that brought about its creation in the first place. Once "the courage of *real* convictions" is restored, what seemed daunting doubts about how to proceed fade away. Tough jobs remain, but clear understanding of purpose and resolu-

tion to get those jobs done replace the doubts and the flabby inability to act.

Brock's 1992 article spelled out how the Party got moving between 1977 and 1980:

As we looked at a prospective Republican agenda ... it became abundantly clear that economic troubles offered a wonderful opportunity for political resurgence. Bill Steiger of Wisconsin, one of our brightest young congressmen, had campaigned for nearly a decade to roll back the demagogic doubling of the capital gains tax. Even the most myopic of liberals had trouble explaining the punitive cap-

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ital gains tax, and the nation was generally chafing under the burden of taxes across the board. Here was a chance to rally our Party, and the country, around a cause that was both economically and politically sound.

In California, the Democrat establishment presents a similarly target-rich opportunity. If the governor's 39 percent approval rating makes him vulnerable, how much more vulnerable are the Democrats who dominate the Legislature and whose level of approval hovers around 20 percent? Don't forget, on recall day in October 2003, Republicans Arnold Schwarzenegger and Tom McClintock, having staked out a clear policy direction for the state, racked up a 62.1 to 31.5 percent victory over Cruz Bustamante. Bustamante, a Democrat for once running on an honest platform (*i.e.*, one accurately reflecting his Party's liberal policy goals), won the lowest share for a Democrat gubernatorial candidate in 71 years, a showing that dwindled to only 26 percent outside the Bay Area. He won pluralities in seven counties, all Bay Area, with a majority only in San Francisco. His totals in many large counties barely rose above third party levels: 17

percent in Orange and Placer, 18 in Kern, 21 in both Riverside and San Bernardino, 24 in San Diego.

Not surprisingly, his Party must resort to extorting involuntary political funding and to gerrymandered districts (as, nationally, it relies on unelected, dictatorial judges) to hold power and shape policy. California Democrats' strength is in organization and determination to do whatever it takes to win, not in public support for their policies.

William Brock's Republicans took the fight to the people, using issues to show the superiority of Republican ideas. As Brock wrote in the article I have been quoting:

With the instigation of Jack Kemp, we put together what we called a "tax blitz." A planeload of Republicans with solid economic credentials criss-crossed the country, visiting with reporters and editors and articulating the Republican commitment to a major reduction in tax rates.

It is important to note that this was not a public relations exercise. We were attempting to lay claim to a set of principles that would define a political program and, in turn, galvanize a flagging party ....

We initiated publications like the quarterly *Common Sense*, which served as a forum for serious debate. And we recruited more than a thousand of our most talented members for service on task forces whose purpose was to define a policy on issues ranging from South African apartheid to energy conservation.

Republicans win when they take their case in this way to the people; arguing with creative enthusiasm, genuine conviction that their cause is right, and respect for voters' intelligence. In 1998, California-based Republican political strategist Arnold Steinberg showed the power of such an approach in an educational advertising campaign in Washington state. Steinberg's effort was designed to complement (while remaining independent of) the political campaign for an initiative, I-200, similar to Ward Connerly's California Civil Rights Initiative that prohibits race and gender preferences for government hiring, contracting, and education. In an article on the campaign, Steinberg wrote:

The \$560,000 educational advertising "flights" included three 60-second radio commercials and one 30-second television commercial. Unlike political advertising, this educational advertising imparted information but did not implore people to support or oppose the measure.

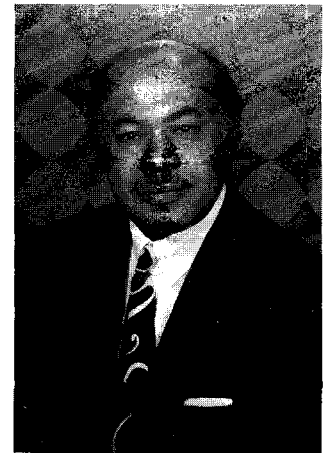
The theme of the ads was "Understanding I-200" ....

The goal was to present a simple, believable message, and since the spots were educational, I wanted them to look and sound educational. Educational, moreover, does not have mean bland. The spots were creative and attention-getting. They sought to hook the listener or viewer at the beginning and to keep that person's interest. But they also were dignified, with understated scripts.

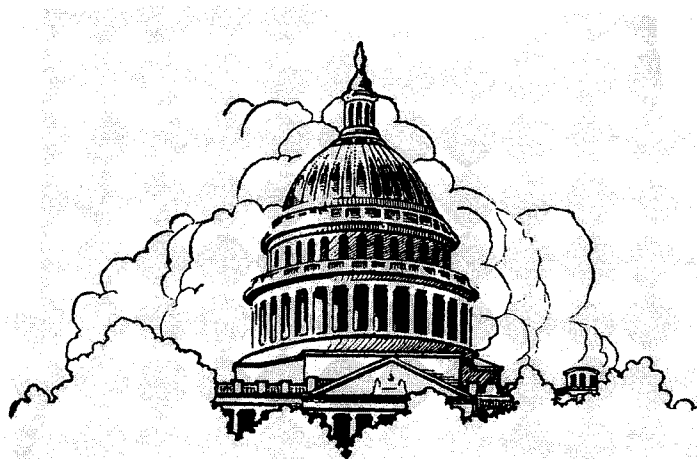
THEY SUCCEEDED. Despite I-200s proponents having been, as usual, massively out-spent, the measure breezed to passage with 58 percent support, taking 38 of Washington's 39 counties. This occurred, moreover, in a year Washington Republicans were losing control of both houses of the Legislature and the state's congressional delegation.

The thoughtful, successful approach to politics of this educational campaign is polls apart from the massively expensive but still somehow seemingly thrown-together, uninspired, cookbook, losing efforts we see routinely in California.

It represents, first, an understanding that moving policy in our direction is goal one, that that alone defines victory, and, second, that successful campaigning requires creative energy and flexibility harnessed to a firm determination to accept no substitute for victory. Californians serious about salvaging their state from the special interest predators still controlling Sacramento, take note.



Ward Connerly



# What is Wrong with Washington?

**Bruce L. Bialosky**

I have the occasion to go to Washington, D.C., about four times a year. Since I have been doing this for a while and have been involved with Republican politics for more than a quarter century, I now have a small bit of sway. With this advantage, my most recent trip offered me the opportunity to understand what is wrong with Washington.

When I go to Washington, I now plan meetings one-on-one with elected officials or elected wannabes. My trips are filled with meetings in between my meetings. I rarely carry a message other than: I am here to help, so please let me know how you

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