



PUMPING IRONY

Three sacrosanct commandments of the American Political Bible fell to pumping irony in California's gubernatorial recall election.

They are, in no particular order of importance, thou shall not 1) run against incumbents 2) finance your own campaign and 3) recall public officials unless they are serial killers.

California voters threw the political play book at Sacramento where at last count there were 27 lobbyists for every one legislator.

It did not matter to 60% of San Diego voters that when Arnold moved from Hollywood to the Governor's mansion, he would be toting a full load of personal baggage from a lifetime of celebrity seeking, and filling a Bekins Van with his own special interest supporters.

The voters wanted something different than governance by campaign contribution. Arnold strutted like a winner, jump starting his campaign with his own money. He rang the bell for systemic revolution, even if the cause was lead by multi-millionaires who put their personal wealth to work against the wizard of fundraising, Gray Davis.

Incumbents all over the state must be quaking and shaking. Especially those who, like Davis, failed to connect with people outside a tight circle of self-reinforcing buddies and swam for too long in an environment where the length of campaign contributors is the gauge of ability to lead.

As Dary Sragow, a Los Angeles political consultant quoted in the *Sacramento Bee* observed, Davis had no political fat in reserve to fall back on.

A trio of unusual races in the City of San Diego this March will measure whether Arnold's millionaire-as-reformer victory will trickle down. If so, watch out state legislators.

It has certainly energized political outsiders locally with enough bucks to shuck the conventional incumbency wisdom that in normal times guarantees little or no opposition. The electorate is in the mood for a political sea change in the direction of transparency and political inclusion.

Both Mayor Dick Murphy and First District Councilman Scott Peters face serious opposition from self-financed opponents who are undaunted by the steroidal endorsement and campaign contributor lists that are standard accoutrements for office holders.

In fact, it is those lists, cohabitated by lobbyists, special interest groups and political cronies, that makes incumbents, fairly or not, vulnerable to reformers with the cash to get their Open-Up City Hall message out.

The tone of the local 2004 campaign season has already

been set by Power to the People Attorney Mike Aguirre, a self-made millionaire with more crusader energy than the ever-ready rabbit.

Aguirre has gathered support from frustrated reform minded activists in communities all over the city in his bid for City Attorney, an office that operates in relative obscurity but one that has enormous impact on municipal well-being. His endorsement list reads like a Who's Who of loyal opposition to the city's establishment.

Current City Attorney Casey Gwinn, who rarely sees a development agreement loophole he cannot defend or a public official derriere he will not protect, is mercifully leaving office because of term limits.

But, Gwinn's deputy Leslie Devaney is running as heir apparent—meal time for the scrappy public interest attorney Aguirre who sued to stop the Chargers from leaving town and end the city's stadium ticket guarantee obligation.

Last week, Port Commissioner Peter Q. Davis began staffing up his surprise campaign for Mayor—unthinkable just a few months ago given Mayor Murphy's apparent popularity among potential voters and mainline support from business and environmental groups.

The former bank president and chair of Center City Development Corporation has impeccable credentials as a personal and public money manager. He has enough personal wealth to fund his second Mayoral campaign. And, having helped steer arguably the most successful redevelopment project in California, he could convince voters he is far better suited to decisively pilot the city out of its looming fiscal nose dive.

The consummate outsider candidate is Republican businessman and political newcomer Phil Thalheimer who has committed significant personal resources to oust current City Councilman Scott Peters, a Democrat. As a declaration of independence, Thalheimer says that he will not accept contributions from developers or lobbyists, the mothers milk of municipal politics.

A friend suggested that the Arnold Factor will create a new outsider aristocracy because only wealthy candidates can run successful campaigns without significant campaign contributions from people who do business with government. Kind of like the Founding Fathers. Now that is pumping irony.

P.S. On another battle front: All best to the fine people who work for Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons who serve our community with great humor, patience and efficiency. With luck your labor dispute was settled to your liking by the time we went to press; if not, I wish you and your families a speedy and satisfactory resolution.